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# Plainfield Commons - A Downtown Revitalization Project Plainfield, New Jersey

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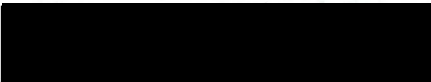
# plainfield commons

A Downtown Revitalization Project  
Plainfield, New Jersey

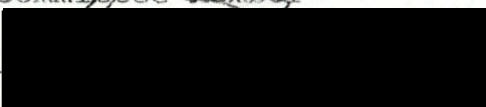
Robert C. Burns


A Terminal Project submitted to the Faculty of  
the College of Architecture, Clemson University,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Architecture.


May, 1982


  
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- John Stephenson for helping to prove that comedy, though not always pretty, remains indispensable
- Finally and most gratefully, Min Ja Bates for her undying affection and continuous support through trying times.

". . . the interweaving of human patterns. They [cities] are full of people doing different things, with different reasons and different ends in view, and the architecture reflects and expresses this difference- which is one of content rather than form alone. Being human, human beings are what interest us most. In architecture as in literature and the drama, it is the richness of human variation that gives color and variety to the human setting . . ."

Eugene Raskin  
Professor of Architecture  
Columbia University  
(quoted in Jacobs, p. 229.)



introduction



The City of Plainfield, New Jersey, was founded in the late 17th century as a farmer community, developing through the early 1800's as a regional manufacturing center. Chartered as a city in 1869, Plainfield continued to develop through the latter part of the 19th century as a commercial center and also became popular with wealthy New Yorkers as a healthful retreat from the noise and grime of New York City. This growth and prosperity continued to develop during the early 20th century as European immigrants and, later, southern Blacks moved into the City to provide a seemingly endless labor pool and Plainfield became firmly established as a major economic center of the region.

This development trend continued through the Second World War as Plainfield's many industries adapted well to the wartime production and economy. The replacement of the railroad by the truck as the primary freight movement system in the 1950's, however, marked the beginning of a long decline for the City. As in the case of many of the nation's older industrial cities, Plainfield underwent an economic decline and radical change in its social structure between the mid-1950's and the late 1960's, culminating in devastating



racial riots in 1967.

To Plainfield's credit, it has not given up, and in the past decade a move to counter this decline has been undertaken by the City with the cooperation of the private business community, resulting in the formation of several government/citizen groups (notably the Plainfield Downtown Development Corporation in 1974). Through a close alliance between the City government and these groups, several programs for the renewal of the Central Business District have been developed; among them a storefront facade remodelling program, a series of street, traffic, and lighting improvements, a Downtown "Semi-Mall" program, and a comprehensive public relations campaign. (see Appendix)

The key to the revitalization of the Downtown Plainfield area, however, is the redevelopment of a 4.5 acre site in the center of the City at the intersection of Front Street and Park Avenue, the main commercial streets. This site, known as Park-Madison, was slated for urban renewal in 1963 and in 1965 was cleared of its buildings which included 52 retail outlets, a church, a theater,

and three small industrial buildings. The site was not developed, however, and is still vacant today, serving as a parking lot. The prolonged vacancy of the site has had a profound effect on the immediately surrounding buildings, notably across Front Street where once thriving retail establishments lost business due to the disrupted pedestrian flow and were forced to close (several of these businesses later reopened at locations outside of Plainfield). What was once a fairly cohesive shopping street through the Downtown suddenly died at the Park-Madison site, the surrounding buildings suddenly became unrentable.

According to the City Planning Director, previous difficulties in developing the site privately, i.e. attracting retail and office tenants, lay primarily in an unrealistic appraisal of both the scale and role of the project within the context of the City and the region. This was spurred largely by a proposed transit link between Newark, NJ/New York City and Plainfield (called "PATH", abandoned in 1978) which would have reestablished Plainfield as a major sub-center of the New York City metro area. With the loss of the PATH extension, the role of Plainfield as a regional



center became limited and financially unfeasible. A reappraisal of the project has indicated that the development of a more community oriented center would be more appropriate and attractive to potential tenants.

Aside from the business communities understandable concerns, however, a more basic problem becomes one of creating a place within the Downtown area that can become a revitalization focal point for the Plainfield community. As mentioned, the Park-Madison renewal site physically occupies a central location in the downtown cityscape. As it exists today, this site is a gravel parking lot, a vast hole in the city fabric. Far worse an eyesore than any of the downtown buildings, the vacant site represents the worst days of Plainfield, a constant reminder of inadequate planning and leadership. Strong, positive development of the site is a necessity in order for Plainfield to regain its self esteem and sense of identity. Once these qualitative issues are addressed, the economic problems of the merchants will begin to fall into place through increased business.

This Terminal Project will thus be directed toward the development and subsequent design of community facilities proposed for the Park-Madison renewal site, emphasizing the relationships of the site and project to the community, and seeking to spur the revitalization of the downtown area of Plainfield.



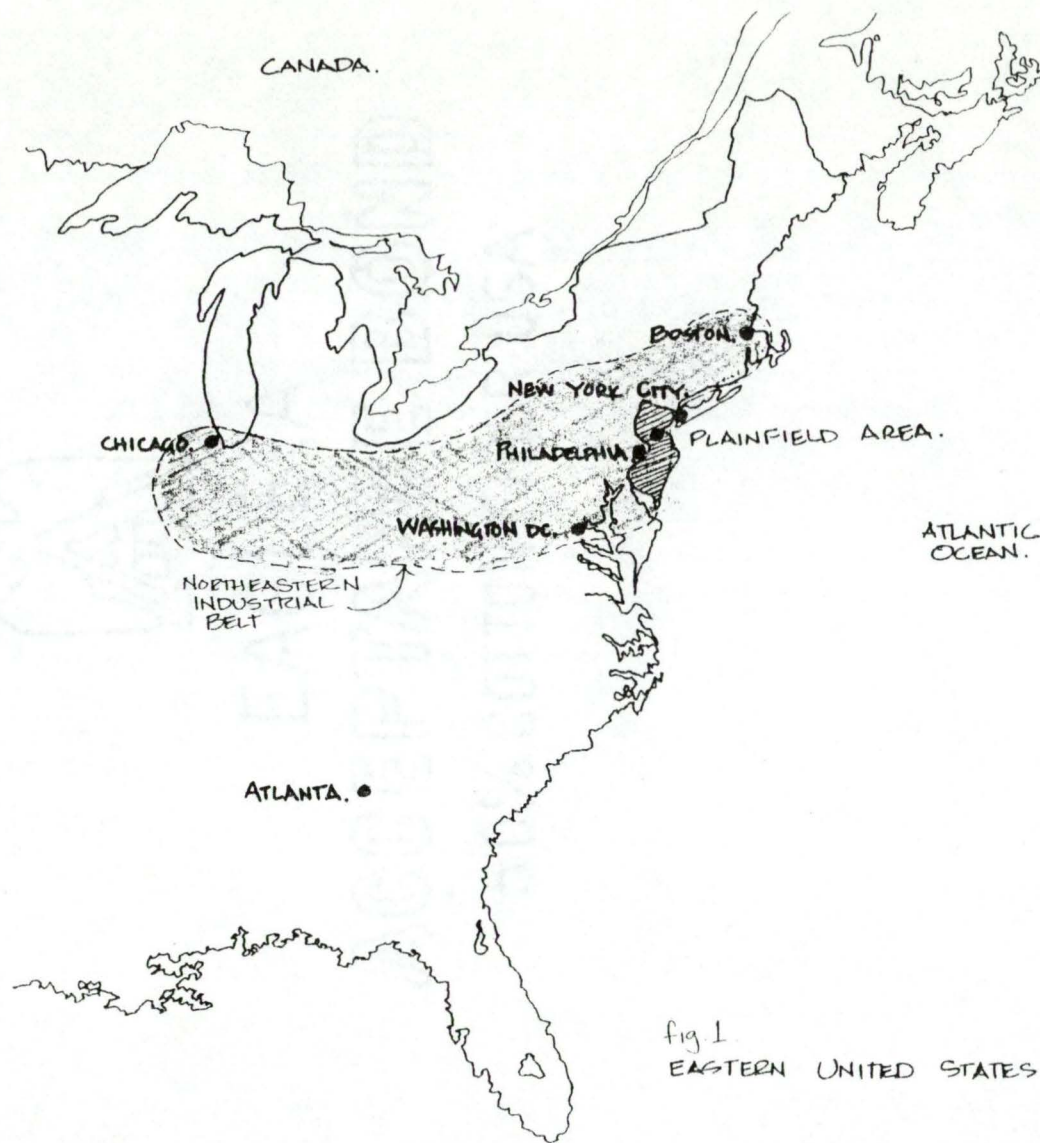
plainfield, nj

## LOCATION

The City of Plainfield is located (see fig. 1,2,3) in Union County in north central New Jersey, approximately twelve miles from Newark and fifteen miles from New York City. Plainfield, as an older urban center, is surrounded by a variety of more recently developed communities, ranging in economic orientation from industrial (such as Piscataway, Middlesex, and South Plainfield) to more rural and residential communities (such as the towns of Warren, Berkeley Heights, and Stirling).

Several major highways pass near Plainfield, including the New Jersey Turnpike, the Garden State Parkway, Interstate Highways 287 and 78, and U.S. Route 22, which is a major commercial strip. Plainfield is directly connected by train to New York and Philadelphia and by bus to most major regional cities.





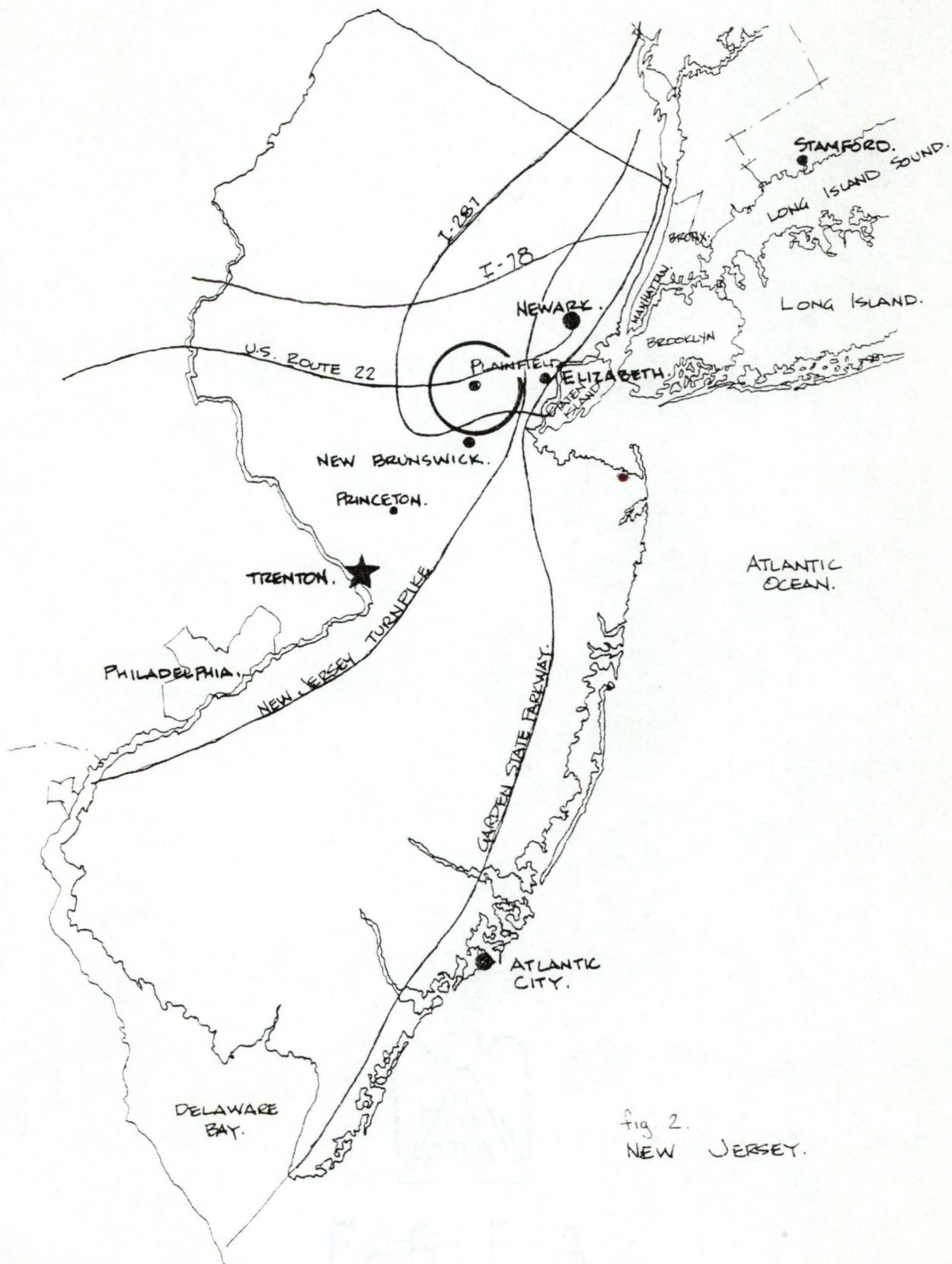


fig 2.  
NEW JERSEY.



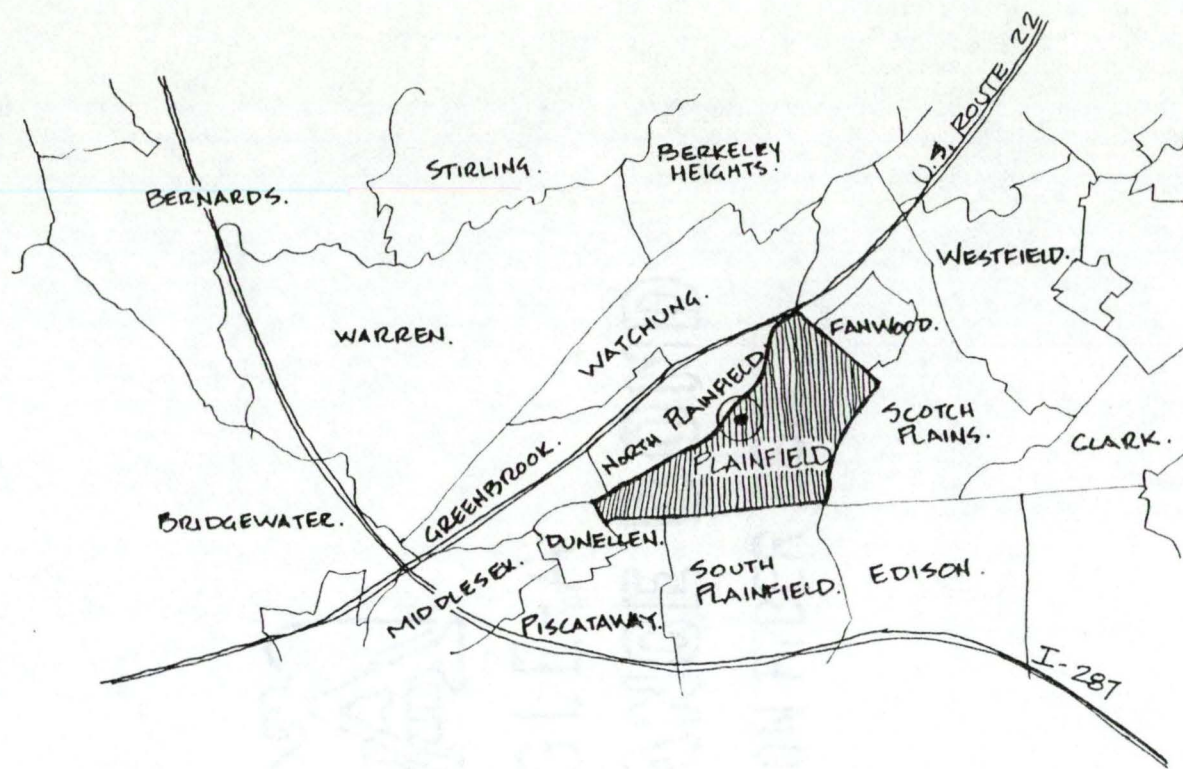


fig. 3.  
THE PLAINFIELD AREA.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Once occupied by Delaware Indians of the Algonquian Tribe, the area of New Jersey now known as "Plainfield" was first settled in 1683 by families of Scottish descent, seeking to escape the religious persecution of Presbyterians in their homeland. As the white settlers moved into the area, the resident indians offered little resistance and migrated westward.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>CN, "History of Plainfield", pp.1-2

The name "Plainfield" was first given to a 700 acre farm owned by one John Barclay in 1685 (see fig.4 ). The name derives from an early description of the area which indicates:

its natural location on a very level plain about 11 miles in length and 2 or 3 in breadth. On the north, about one and a quarter miles distant, runs a range of mountains, from 300 to 450 feet high, which... beautify the scenery by affording a fine contrast to the plain below...<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>CN, "History of Plainfield", pp.3-4.

The Barclay land was sold in 1692 to John Laing and the name was continued as Laing opened his home for use as a meeting place for the local group of Quakers, which became the Plainfield Meeting of



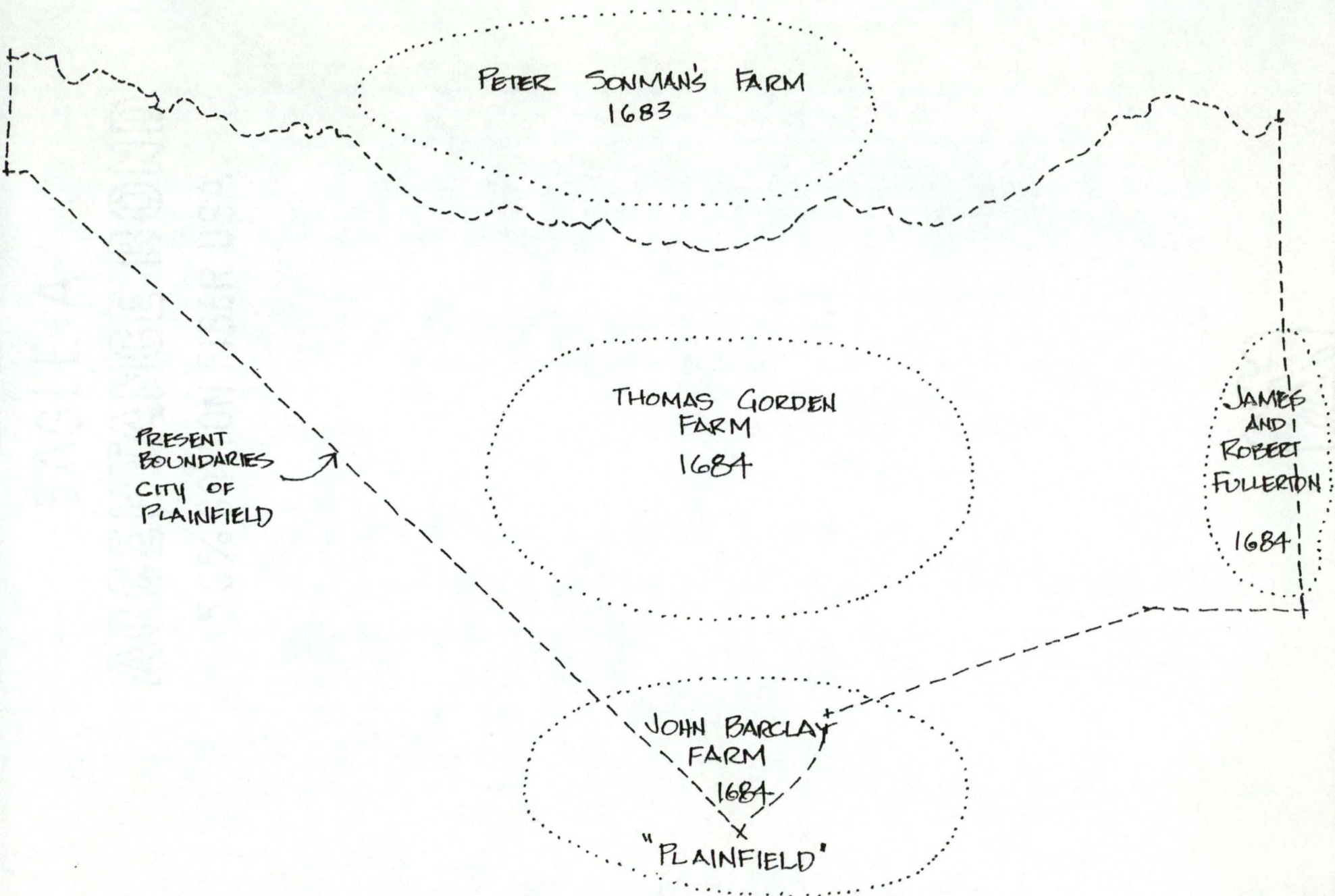


fig. 4. Early settlers of the Plainfield Area.

The Society of Friends. In addition, the area around what is now Front and Somerset Streets became known as "Milltown" for the grist mill that was built near Watchung Avenue on Green Brook in 1692. This name continued until 1800, when the Plainfield Post Office was opened.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>CN, "History of Plainfield", pp.3-4.

From this beginning, Plainfield grew slowly, having only 215 residents by 1800. Despite its small population, however, Plainfield occupied an important position during the American Revolution. A militia post was built along the east bank of Green Brook between what are now Clinton and West End Avenues. This 95 acre fortress guarded the strategic main road leading from the Blue Mountains (now the Watchung Mountains) via what are now Somerset and Front Streets to Quibbletown (now Piscataway). In addition, on June 26-27, 1777, the important Battle of Short Hills was fought just to the south of Plainfield. It was in this famous battle that the British general Howe was defeated and prevented from reaching the colonial capital of Philadelphia. During this battle, General George Washington set up his command post in the Nathaniel Drake house in Plainfield.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>CN, "History of Plainfield", p.7.



After the end of the Revolution, the town of Plainfield began to change gradually from a farming community to a center for the hat making industry. Between 1808 (when the first hat factory was opened) and 1835 (the height of the trade) the number of master hatters had risen to thirteen, with a total production value of \$80,000 in merchandise for that year. The town's population in 1835 was 1000 residents.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>CN, "History of Plainfield", p.9.

In 1837, Plainfield's fortunes were boosted as the Easton & Amboy railroad was built to link Plainfield with the city of Elizabeth, giving local residents and travellers access to New York City. This made Plainfield a major commuter town with a steady population increase (see fig.5 ). By the late 1840's, the need had arisen for public education and so two public schools were opened in 1847, the first public schools in New Jersey. Finally on April 2, 1869, Plainfield was incorporated as a city, governed (as it is today) by three aldermen, a mayor, and an eleven member Common Council. The neighboring area of North Plainfield was in turn chartered as an independent borough in 1885.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>CN, "History of Plainfield", pp.10-14.

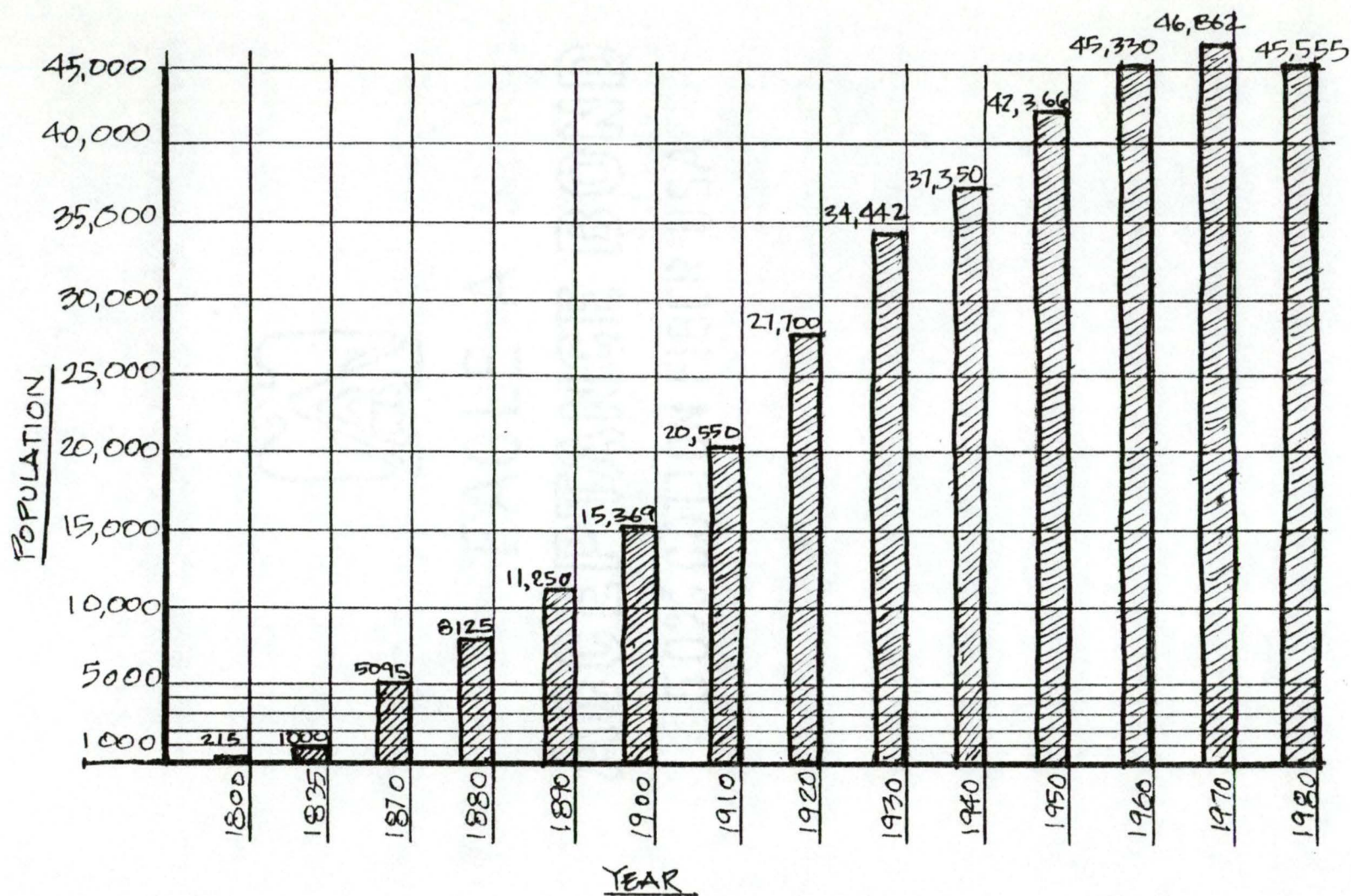


Fig. 5. POPULATION GROWTH OF PLAINFIELD.

SOURCE: LAPSLEY, HOWARD G., CITY OF PLAINFIELD.



This steady growth continued, and by 1900 the City of Plainfield had earned the nickname "The Queen City of New Jersey" and had become a popular vacation retreat for wealthy New Yorkers. Huge Victorian and Tudor mansions (see fig.6,7 ) were built in the city by these Wall Street executives, who were attracted by the easy commute and the scenic natural beauty of the Watchung Mountains. Records show that in 1880, out of a total population of about 12,000 inhabitants, 100 City residents were millionaires.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Prior, p.51.

Population and economic growth continued to thrive through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as Plainfield became more developed as a commercial, manufacturing and cultural center of Central New Jersey. In 1925, Plainfield was still considered a "residential city", but the value of the manufactured products of the city's fifty-seven industries was over \$18 million. As the supply of immigrants from Europe during this period dwindled, the Black became the new labor resource, arriving in Plainfield mainly from the rural South. By 1931, the Black population in Plainfield had reached 10% and outnumbered the foreign born residents.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Ruch, pp. 25-28.





fig. 6.

Residence of Job Mable  
1<sup>st</sup> Mayor of Plainfield .c. 1869



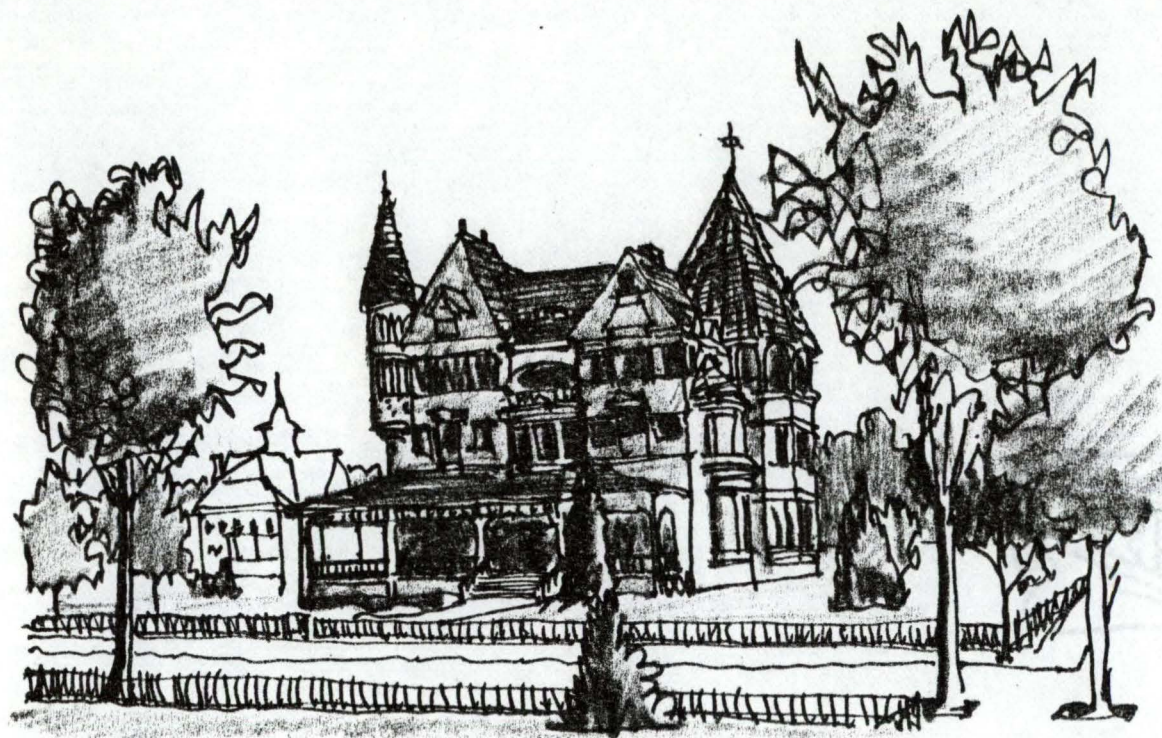


fig. 7

Residence of J. Kirkner  
Plainfield, N.J.  
c. 1882

During the Second World War, Plainfield's industries were diverted toward the war effort and the number of businesses continued to grow. By 1949, eighty-eight industries were established in the City, including manufacturers of automobile and truck motors, printing machinery, power tools, concrete vaults and electric motors.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ruch, pp. 31-32.

By the middle 1950's, the new spatial requirements of modern manufacturing compelled industry to relocate west of Plainfield where there was sufficient room for expansion. Trucks replaced the railroad as the primary freight system and the lack of major highway access hindered the city's development. Once the railroad oriented urban commuter center, Plainfield now found itself in direct competition with the new suburban areas relying on the automobile and was rapidly losing ground.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Ruch, p. 35.

This downward social and economic trend continued during the early 1960's and climaxed in the racial riots of 1967 that shook most of the nation. The City of Plainfield appeared to have hit bottom and since then has tried desperately to raise itself. Groups of concerned citizens and businessmen have been formed, and it is this



reaction that probably spurred Plainfield's selection in 1976 as one of the nation's ten "All-American Cities" by the National Municipal League, a non-profit group that encourages citizen involvement in government. Although the City is now predominantly Black, studies show that the new Black residents are upwardly mobile, coming to Plainfield from other cities in the Northeast (especially Newark), rather than from the rural South. In addition, these new residents have an occupational status higher than the state average and seem to view Plainfield as a place where they can improve their situation. It appears as if Plainfield is not ready to quit yet.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ruch, pp. 40-41.

## REGIONAL CONTEXT

As mentioned, Plainfield did at one time have a real regional domination in terms of cultural offerings and commercial and manufacturing trades. This widespread influence has been dwindling since the 1950's, however, and today few people outside of Plainfield consider the city to be a regional cultural center, and even fewer outsiders think of it as a commercial center. A significant contributing factor for this decline seems to be difficulty of regional access into Plainfield.

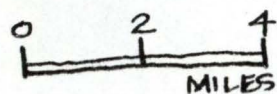
Regional access into Plainfield is accomplished via either automobile, railroad or bus. Several major highways pass near Plainfield, but access to them is indirect and fairly limited (see fig. 2,3). Interstate Highway 287, a main artery connecting the New Jersey Turnpike with the New York State Thruway, passes through South Plainfield, five miles south of downtown Plainfield. I-287 links Plainfield with both the Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway. U.S. State Route 22, a major commercial strip, passes through North Plainfield and access into the downtown from this highway is fairly direct, although the two lane route down Somerset Street can become congested at times and travel may be time consuming.<sup>1</sup>



Smith Report, p. 2.



Railroad transit into Plainfield would have received a great boost had the proposed PATH extension been approved and completed. The PATH (Port Authority Trans Hudson) line is operated by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and currently links the World Trade Center in Manhattan with Pennsylvania Station in Newark (see fig.8 ). The 1972 extension plan would have continued this line westward to Plainfield via Newark International Airport and the city of Elizabeth. Opposition to the plan came from influential Republican congresspeople, Senator Clifford P. Case and Representative Millicent Fenwick, who objected on the grounds that the project was too expensive and that unwanted congestion would result in certain [affluent] Central New Jersey suburbs. Also opposing the project were the communities lying to the west of Plainfield who felt that their needs were being ignored.

As long as the Republican Party controlled federal policy, Senator Case successfully blocked the extension without much trouble. With the Democrats gaining power in 1976, Senator Harrison A. Williams, Jr. (a PATH supporter) took control of the struggle and soon approval of the extension seemed certain. Local opposition to the plan



 CURRENT SERVICE  
 PROPOSED EXTENSION

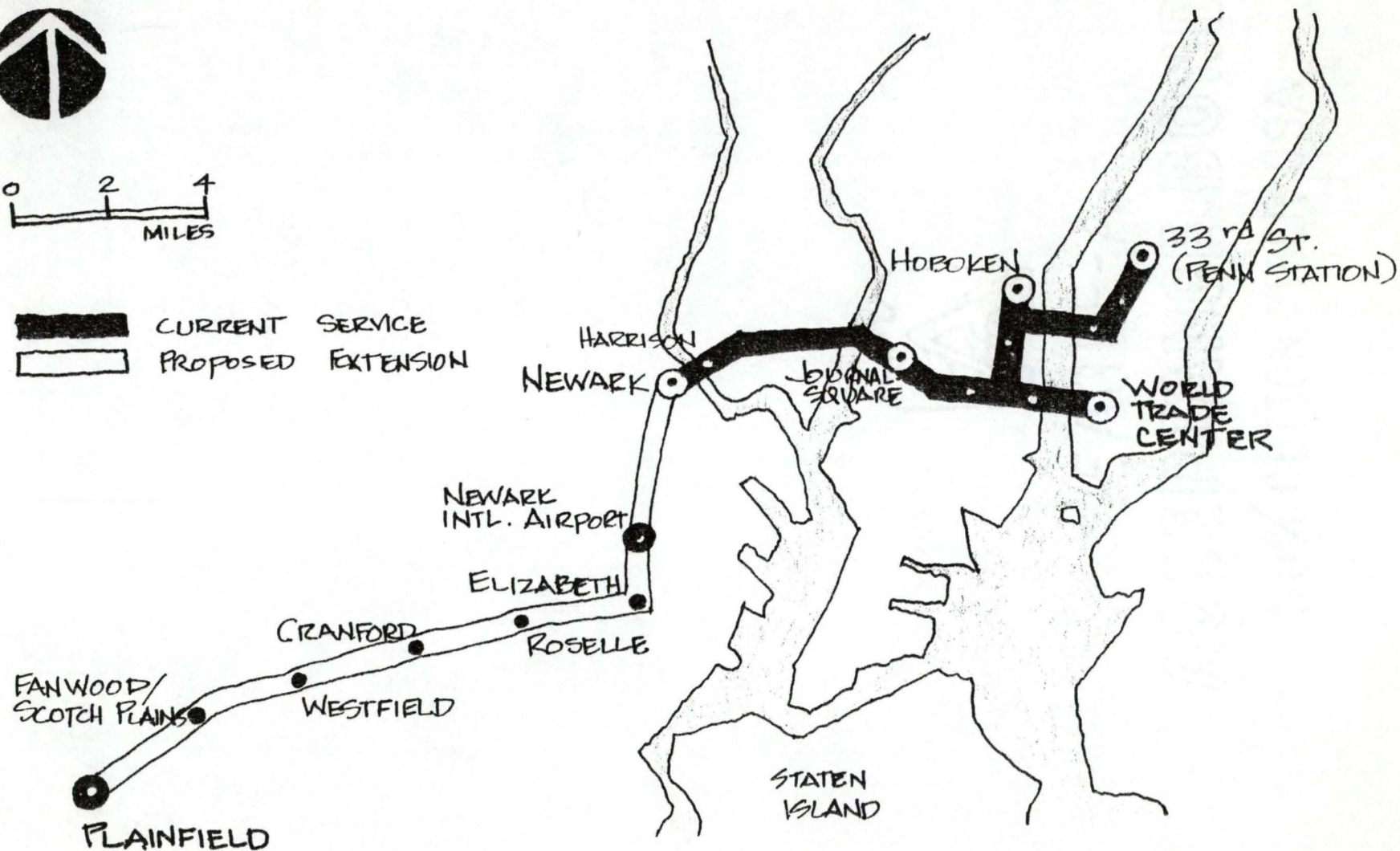


fig. 8. PROPOSED PATH EXTENSION - 1972.

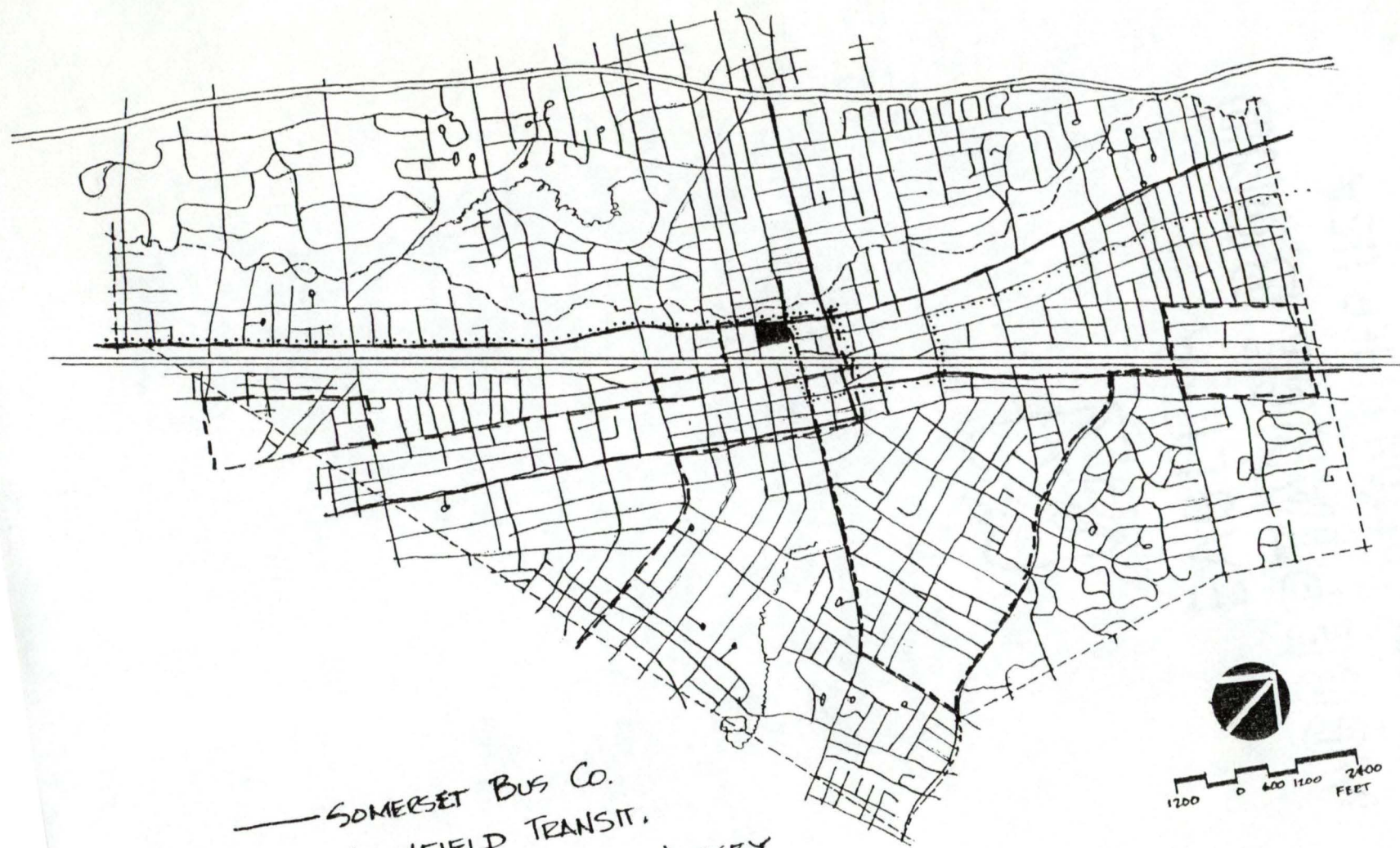


increased its intensity, however, and at the last moment Somerset County elected to go to court to block the plan, preferring to upgrade existing railroad facilities. The final blow to the PATH extension came on April 27, 1977, when the United States Supreme Court decided that Port Authority money could not be used to build new railroad lines that were projected to lose money. As a result, \$120 million in funds were lost and the PATH extension was effectively killed.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hogan, pp.7-8.

As it is, the Central Railroad of New Jersey has implemented all new and refurbished rolling stock on the line between Plainfield and Newark which, with an average of 26 trains per day stopping in Plainfield in each direction, remains a major commuter route into Newark and New York City. The service is now fairly efficient and comfortable, and the railroad company has also committed itself to helping the city of Plainfield to renovate the existing train station and platform.

Three commercial bus companies currently operate to link Plainfield with its neighboring cities and elsewhere (see fig.9). Plainfield



—— SOMERSET BUS CO.  
----- PLAINFIELD TRANSIT.  
..... TRANSPORT OF NEW JERSEY.

Fig. 9. PLAINFIELD BUS OPERATIONS.



Transit Company generally services the City on the community level, connecting the east and west ends of the City with the downtown, and also travels to North and South Plainfield. The Somerset Bus Company connects with I-287 and also provides bus access into New York City (a trip of one hour). Transport of New Jersey operates mainly through Plainfield to Newark, with numerous stops.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Smith Report, p.2.

## SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

In its social make up, the City of Plainfield is typical of older urban centers, that is, a predominance of lower income residents living in the downtown area, with higher income residents living further from the city center (the mean income in 1970 in Plainfield was \$12,587, see fig. 10). Other social data also follows this trend.

Racially, for example, Plainfield is now 60.2% Black (up from 40% in 1970), with most of these residents living in the downtown core (see fig. 11). The 28.4% White residents occupy the majority of residences away from the Central Business District. By comparison, North Plainfield remains a predominantly White municipality (91.2%), with even Hispanic residents (4.6%) outnumbering Blacks (1.4%).

Among the White residents of Plainfield, there is a strong segment of persons of foreign stock, with foreigners accounting for at least half of the White people in several downtown census tracts. Among the largest foreign groups are the Italians, Germans, and Eastern Europeans, with residents of Anglo-Saxon descent dominating the foreign groups in the upper income areas.



fig. 10. Income Characteristics.  
 SOURCE: 1970 CENSUS OF POPULATION, NEWARK, NJ, SMSA  
 TABLE P-4 - "INCOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION: 1970".

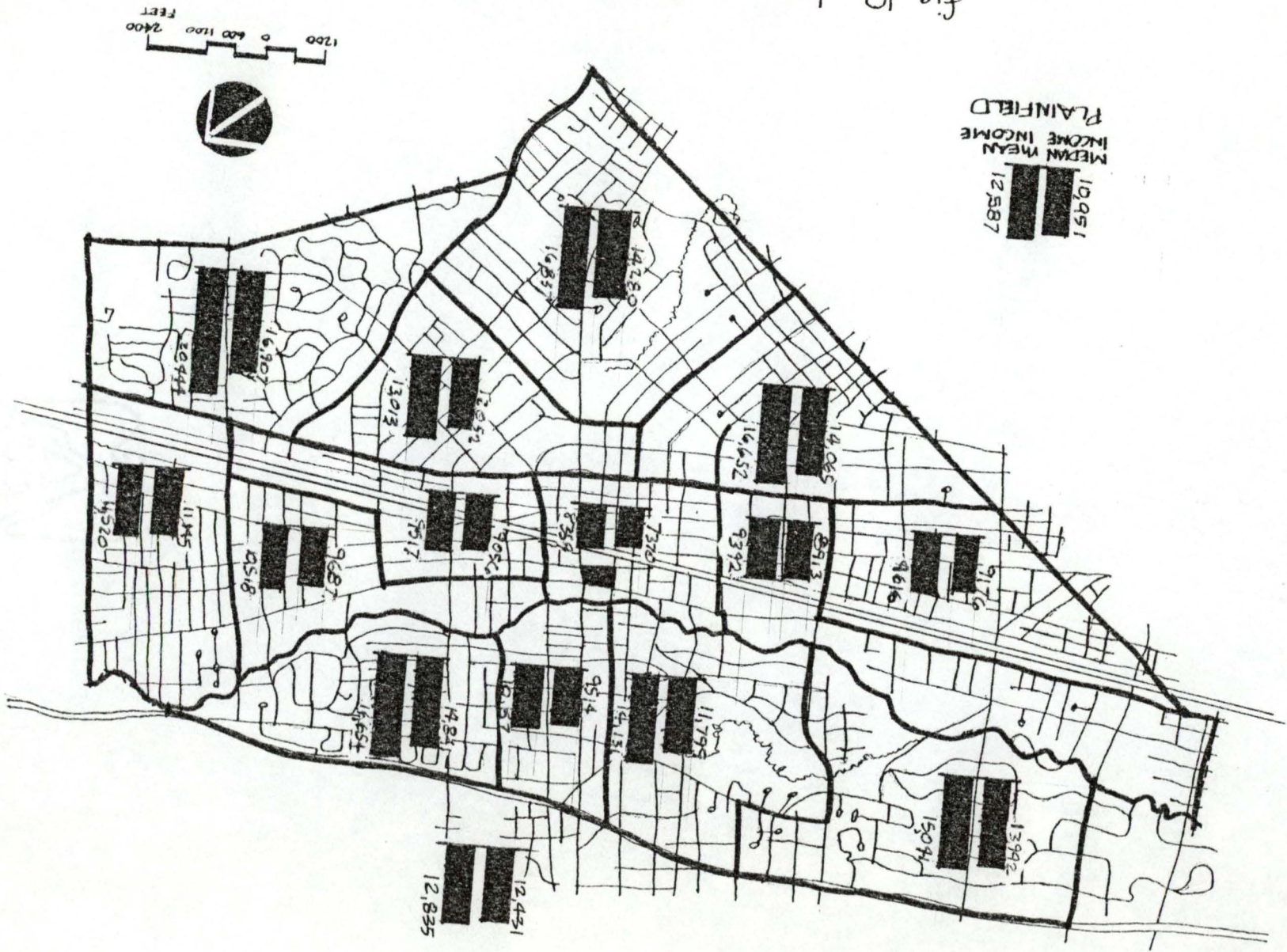
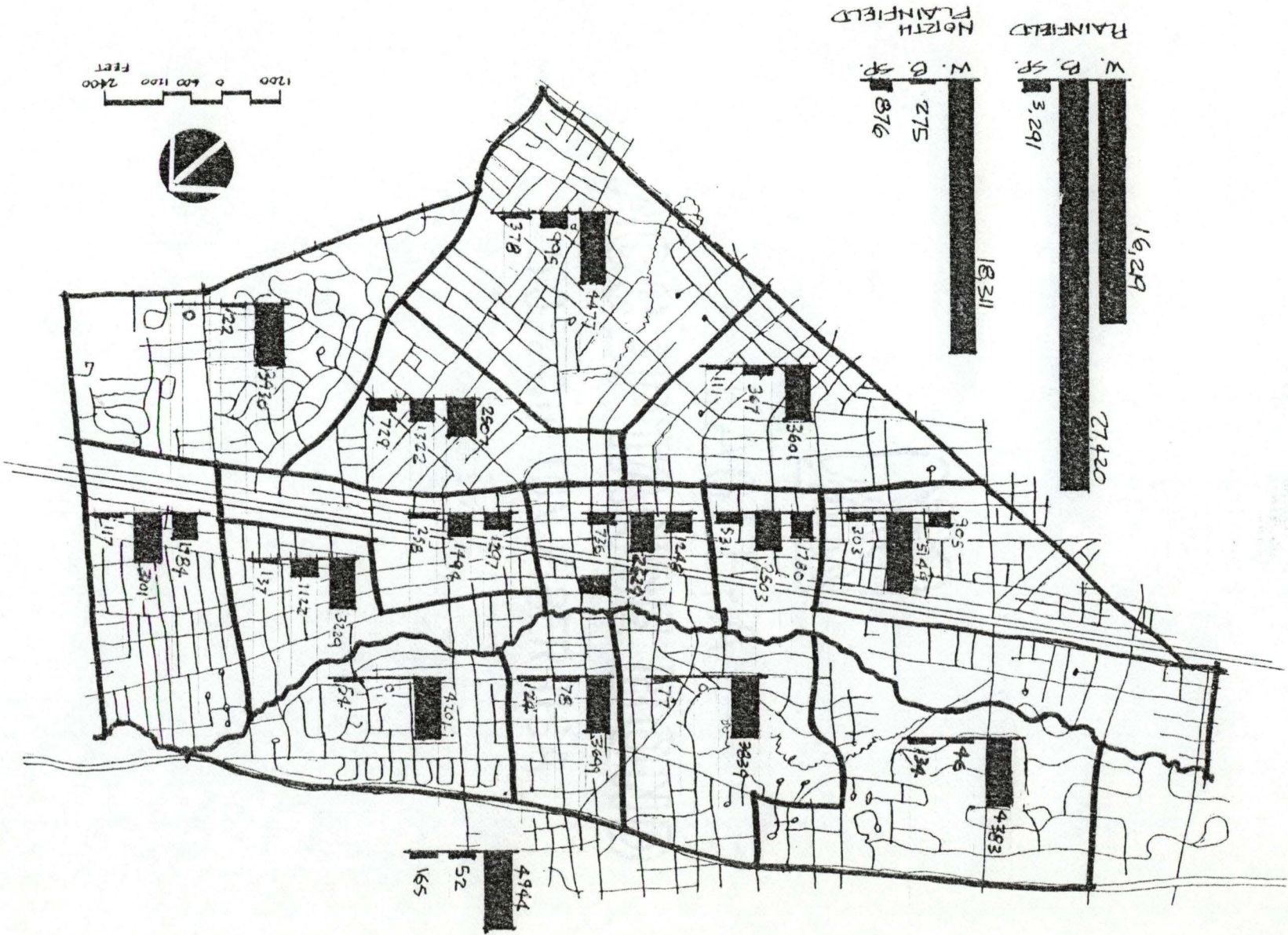




fig. 11. RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS.  
 SOURCE: ADVANCE REPORT 1980 CENSUS OF POPULATION & HOUSING,  
 TABLE 1: "PERSONS BY RACE AND SPANISH ORIGIN & HOUSING  
 UNIT COUNTS: 1980."





Residents under the age of eighteen years make up a substantial group in both Plainfield and North Plainfield. In Plainfield, there were 15,624 persons (33.3%) below eighteen in 1970, while in North Plainfield this figure is 6249 (32.7%). Persons over the age of sixty-five accounted for 11% of the population in Plainfield in 1970 and 10.9% of the residents of North Plainfield, another substantial group of residents.

ECONOMIC  
CHARACTERISTICS

Although it was once the commercial focal point of the area, the City of Plainfield no longer enjoys that claim. In the past twenty years since Plainfield lost its position, several regional shopping centers have been built throughout the central New Jersey area, scattering the retail trade in an area so large that no single town could be considered a commercial focal point.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hogan, p.9 .

In downtown Plainfield, the streetlevel storefront vacancy rate has remained stable over the past five years at about 14%<sup>2</sup>, with the surviving businesses being the local, community oriented establishments. The businesses depending on a regional influence, such as large department stores (for example, Tepper's and Steinbach's), have had a difficult time staying in business due in large part to the lack of regional access into Plainfield. The one exception to this seems to be Bamberger's Department Store on Front Street which has developed a substantial regional following and appears to have overcome the problems that plagued the other stores.

<sup>2</sup>Smith Report, p.ii.

An examination of trends in "covered" employment (see fig.12), will



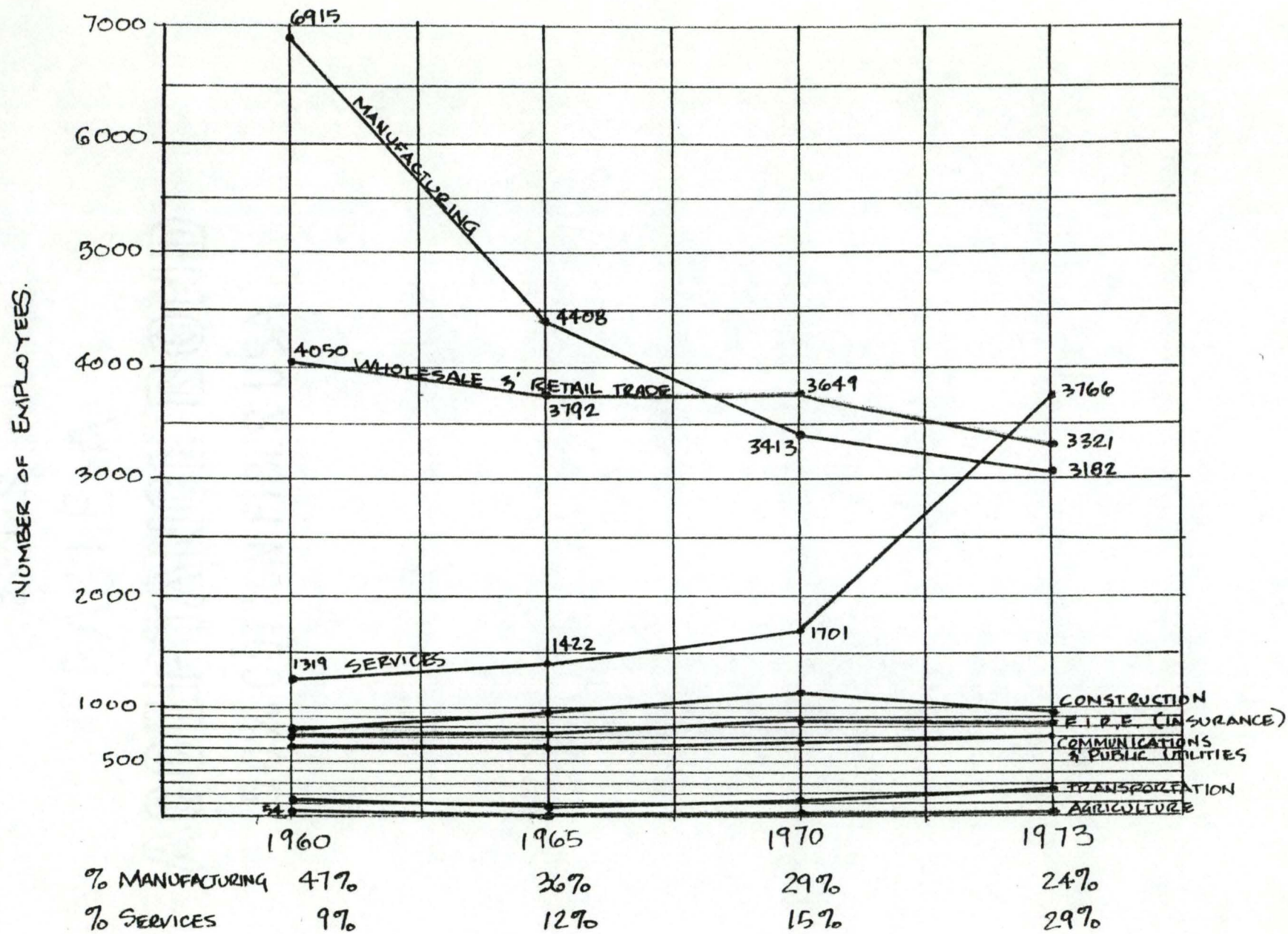


fig. 12. "COVERED" EMPLOYMENT - PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY.  
(COVERED UNDER N.J. STATE UNEMPLOYMENT LAW)

show us that since 1960, when Plainfield still held prominence as a manufacturing and retail center, the number of persons employed in manufacturing trades has declined drastically, with wholesale and retail trades declining slightly. On the other hand, the number of service employees during this period has increased dramatically. In the period between 1973 and 1980, these figures have stabilized according to City officials.

The Shopper's Survey conducted by Larry Smith & Co. in 1974 (see fig. 13) reveals some consumer concerns about downtown Plainfield. In this survey, the most important considerations were deemed to be greater security (73.6% of those questioned) and cleaner streets (70.4%), while refurbished stores (35.2%) and more eating facilities (30.1%) were also supported positively. Additionally, 26.4% of those people surveyed mentioned the need for more parking facilities and 29.6% expressed a desire for less traffic congestion.



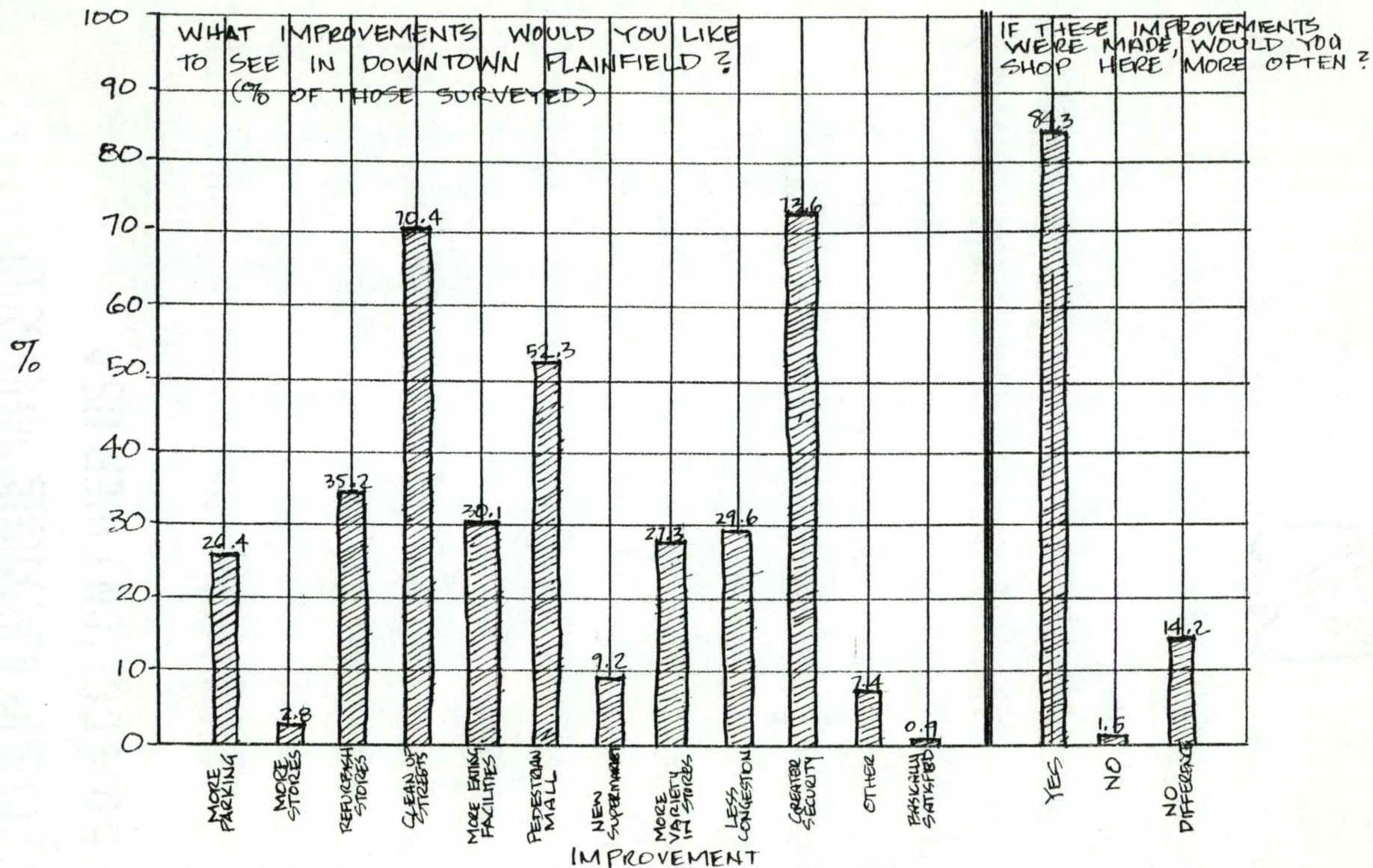


Fig. 13. CONSUMER FAVORED IMPROVEMENTS IN PLAINFIELD.  
(SOURCE: LARRY SMITH & CO. SHOPPER'S SURVEY, 1974).

PHYSICAL  
CHARACTERISTICS

The downtown business district in Plainfield (see fig.14) consists of approximately twenty-three square blocks bounded by Central Avenue on the west, Green Brook on the north (but effectively extending down Somerset Street into North Plainfield), Roosevelt Avenue on the east, and Seventh Street on the south. Within this area is located most of the retail, office, and other commercial development in Plainfield. The main commercial street is Front Street.<sup>1</sup>

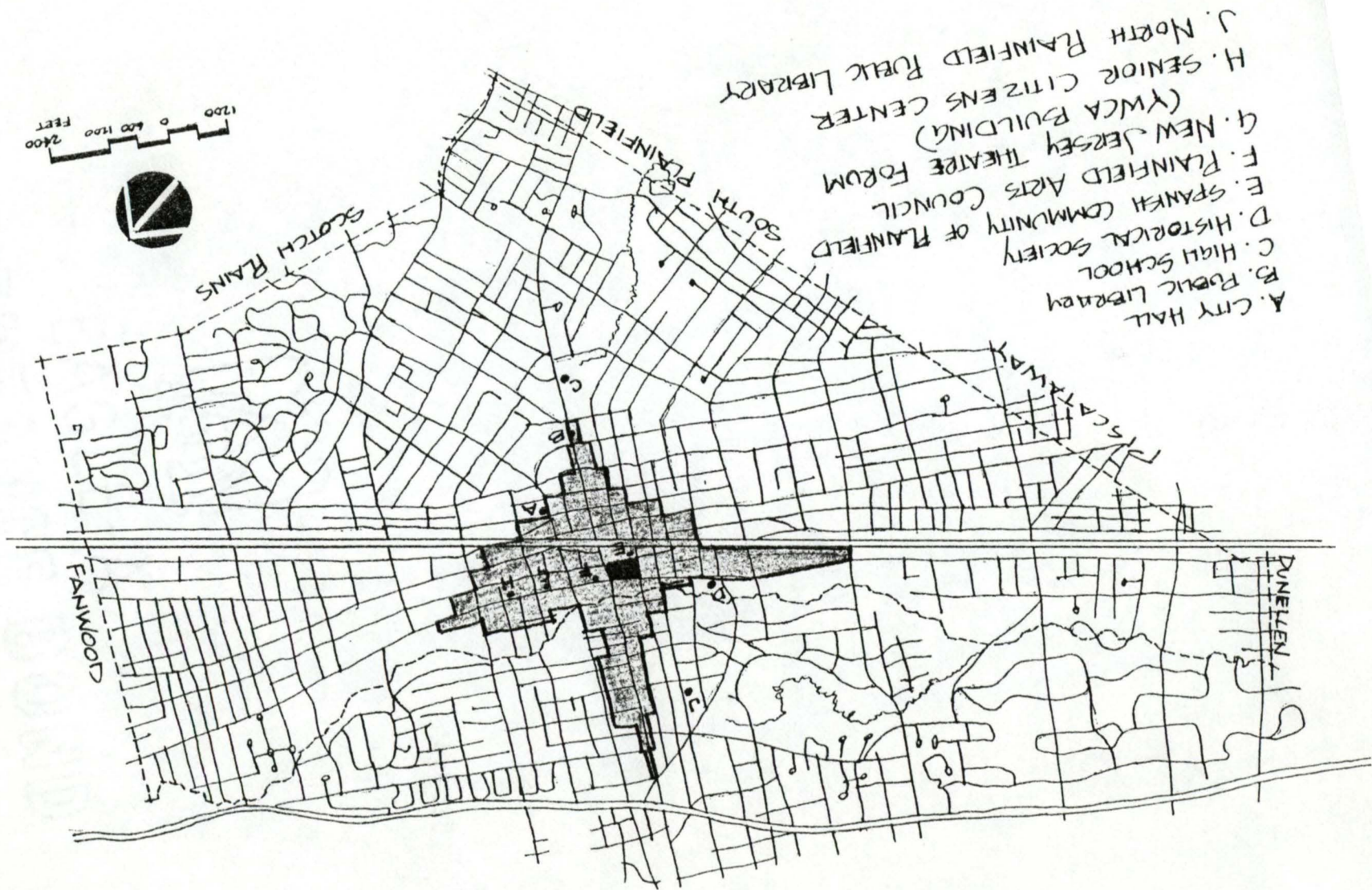
<sup>1</sup>Smith Report, p.1.

Currently, the development in downtown Plainfield consists primarily of one and two story (with occasional three and four story) buildings, divided into retail outlets on the street level and offices and apartments on the upper floors. Few buildings have been developed as "office" buildings and throughout the city many small businesses operate out of private homes. The predominant commercial building material is brick of various colors, primarily brown or red, but sometimes painted white.

Strong commercial activity continues across Green Brook along Somerset Street into North Plainfield, and so the Park-Madison site



fig. 14. DOWNTOWN RAINFIELD.



may be seen as being centrally located to the entire development, rather than being relegated to the north end of the Central Business District. This site is close to a variety of retail activities as well as banking facilities and thus seems well suited to become a focal point of downtown community revitalization.



the site



## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The recent history of the Park-Madison renewal site is a story of delays and frustration for everyone involved. It began in 1958 when the City of Plainfield began taking speculative non-binding surveys of the citizens and local merchants as to what should be done about the run down block. From this beginning, the public reaction to the project was mixed. Some citizens opposed the plan, rejecting the idea that the tract should officially be declared "blighted", as is required by federal urban renewal regulations, and claiming that the project would take too long to develop. Others were in favor of the "blighted" designation and pointed out that

24 of the 43 structures on the block are substandard and have serious deficiencies; at least 19 of the 39 dwelling units are deficient; surrounding streets and intersections are unsafe; obsolescence and overcrowding are evident.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>CN, "Downtown Block Called 'Blighted'," August 16, 1962.

Discussion continued and in 1960 the City Common Council voted to appropriate \$40,000 to study the federal guidelines involved. Finally in 1962 the City Planning Board voted in favor of the project and the block was officially declared "blighted". The City's



urban renewal application to the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) was approved in May, 1963, with the federal grant being \$2,942,892 and Plainfield's share being \$1,211,700.

From the beginning, the City had intended to secure the services of a developer with a viable plan for redevelopment of the block before any demolition would occur. Once the land was cleared, the developer would then "purchase the land and erect buildings under a plan devised by the city." Locating the developer proved to be more difficult than anticipated, however, and so in April, 1964, the anxious Common Council ordered the City Housing Authority to begin buying up property in the renewal block, repeating its statements that no demolition would take place until a developer was retained.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CN, "Plainfield Given 'Green Light' for Madison-Park Program", June 1, 1963.

Finally in March, 1965, Ancott of Plainfield, Inc. submitted a \$5 million proposal for the redevelopment of the site including an office building, a major department store, a motor hotel, and a multi-level parking garage. This proposal received tentative approval by the Common Council and a \$68,480 demolition contract was issued to the firm of A. Tomae & Sons of Newark, with the demolition work

commencing in July, 1965.

In December, 1966, Ancott was officially declared developer of the renewal tract, agreeing to take title to the block by May 1, 1967 and to begin construction by May 31. The prospects took a turn upward in March, 1967, when the Plainfield Trust State National Bank (now the United National Bank) announced its intentions to occupy the new twelve story office tower. By May 1, however, Ancott had still failed to attract enough commercial tenants and succeeded in postponing its procurement of the block until September of 1967. A series of deadline postponements followed, with Ancott unwilling to undertake the risk without tenant backing until finally the bank withdrew its support and Ancott was dismissed as developer in June, 1969..

In the meantime, the Common Council had reacted favorably toward a proposal by the Arthur H. Padula Corporation of Newark who outlined a \$21 million plan to construct two twenty-eight story "semi-luxury" apartment buildings, a fourteen story office building, some retail stores and a 1000 car underground parking facility. The Plainfield Area Chamber of Commerce, however, opposed anything



but commercial redevelopment on the site and negotiations were at a standstill when Padula was forced to file for bankruptcy in September, 1969.

In 1971, a third developer was chosen: Lester Dworman, Inc. of New York City. Dworman proposed a mixed use facility including an enclosed shopping mall, a nine story office building, a fourteen story apartment building, and a parking garage. Three years of marketing produced no potential tenants, however, and in 1974 Dworman was declared in default of his contract and dismissed.

In this same year, the Plainfield Downtown Development Corporation (DDC) was formed as a non-profit liason between the City government and the private business sector. Acting as developer, the DDC commissioned an economic feasibility study by Larry Smith & Company, Inc. of New York City and engaged the New York Architectural/Planning firm of Gruen Associates to do some preliminary design work. This resulted in a Gruen proposal in 1975 to construct a two level enclosed shopping mall with two ten story office towers and a 650 car parking structure. Again, however, proper tenant backing failed

to materialize and the project was effectively stifled for the fourth time in ten years.

Most recently, in 1979, the New Rochelle, New York, construction firm of Carlin-Atlas, Inc. was engaged as developer of the renewal site and they have proposed that the project be built in two phases, commercial outlets first, followed by the construction of the offices. The current reasoning is that if the new retail could establish itself and upgrade the downtown, the office potential would improve. Subsequently, once the offices are completed and occupied, the downtown business district will thrive. In conjunction with Carlin-Atlas, a regional real estate agency, Cross & Brown, has begun to seek prospective tenants, managing to draw requests for about 20,000 square feet of new retail space (1000 to 3000 square feet per retail outlet) but no requests for office space. Leo Kornblath and Associates of New York City has been retained as architect and their shopping mall and ten story "executive tower" are included in the plan currently being marketed (see Case Study E). In the summer of 1981, both Carlin-Atlas and Cross & Brown were redesignated as developer and leasing agent for the renewal project.



## URBAN CONTEXT

The potential of the Park-Madison site as a catalyst for the revitalization of Plainfield is good. The physical reasons for this potential will be dealt with in a moment, but there are other factors to consider. First, the very fact that this site has stood vacant for so long is a strong reason why it may be seen to be the focus of the psychological revitalization of the City, the key element for the City's return in the eyes of its citizens. Rather than a symbol of failure, positive redevelopment of the site can serve as a sign of new prosperity. Within the specific urban context of Plainfield, the key to positive redevelopment is the consideration of the citizens and merchants of the City.

Constructing retail outlets that remain vacant or create more vacancies in the downtown area is not positive. Building high rent apartments or executive offices (assuming that tenants could be found - a big assumption as we've seen) that the average citizen would never set foot in is not positive. A positive development is one that would allow a wide variety of City dwellers to participate at least some of the time. A positive development would accept the fact that Plainfield is no longer a regional center and would deal with the sense of community instead. A positive development would

help to alleviate some of the current City problems, such as crime, and would also help to enliven the downtown during the evening and other "dead" periods, giving people a reason for being in downtown Plainfield. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a positive development of the Park-Madison renewal site must give Plainfield citizens an increased awareness of their sense of identity, their rights and responsibilities, that is, what it means to be a Plainfielder, and it must give visitors to Plainfield a sense of the City's self esteem.



## ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Primary automobile access to the Park-Madison site (see fig.15) is achieved via Somerset Street from the north, Park Avenue from the south, and Front Street from the east and west. These routes converge on the corner of Front Street and Park Avenue, making it the main corner in the downtown area. The traffic "jog" between Somerset Street and Park Avenue is not seen here as a purely negative aspect, but on the contrary appears to offer a positive point as traffic along Somerset Street (the main access from heavily travelled Route 22) catches sight of the renewal area well in advance of arrival. This offers the opportunity for a real processional experience of the block from that direction. Although the jog at times creates some traffic tieups, alternatives to the complete elimination of the jog should be explored.

An analysis of the Solid/Void relationships provides some interesting insights (see fig.16). We see that the relationship between building mass and parking areas follows a traditional plan, with a strong building line along the major street (Front Street) and an eroded "void" behind in which parking activities occur. Passageways are provided between buildings at random intervals connecting Front Street with the parking lots.

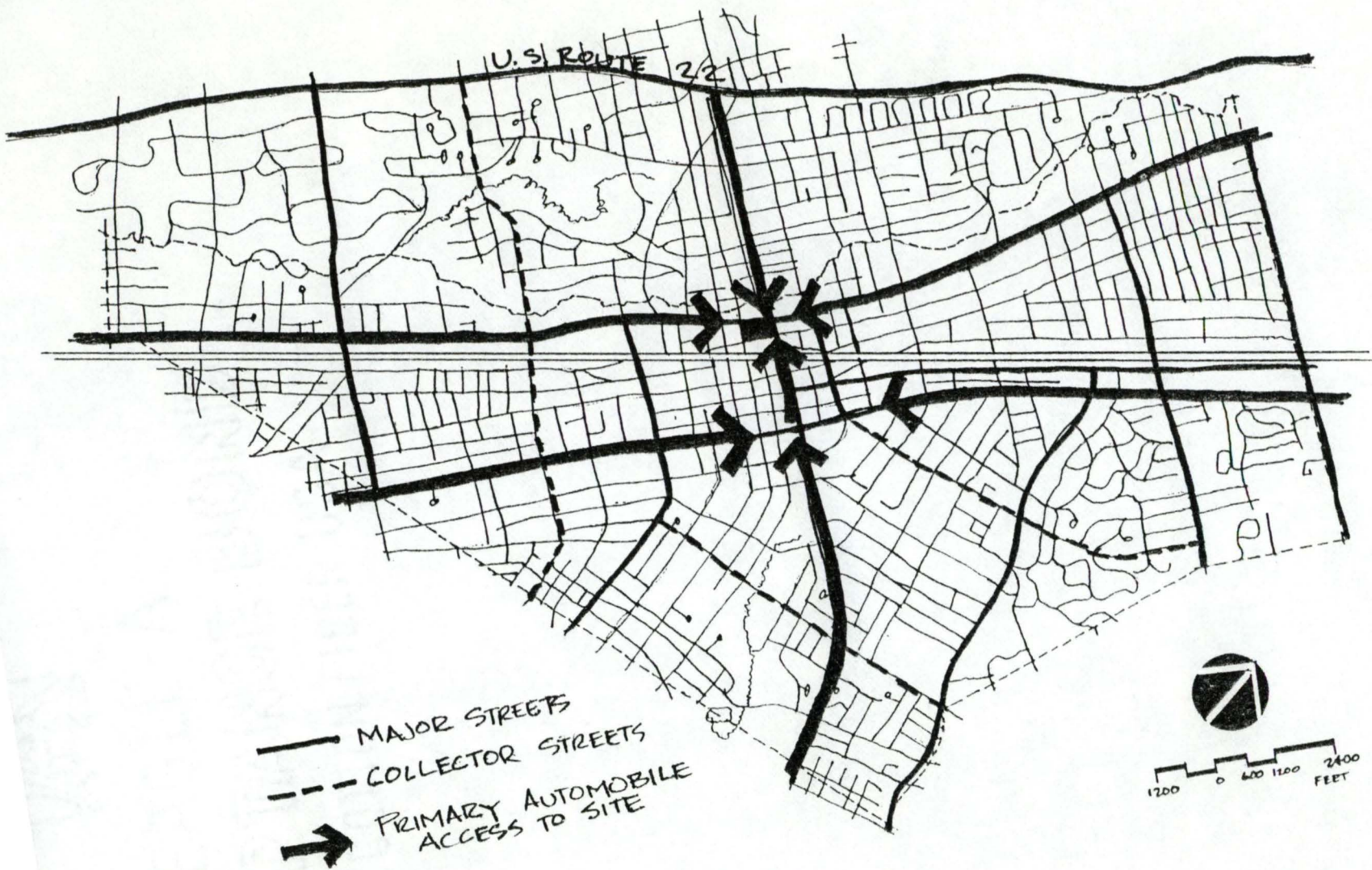


fig. 15. AUTOMOBILE ACCESS TO PARK-MADISON SITE.



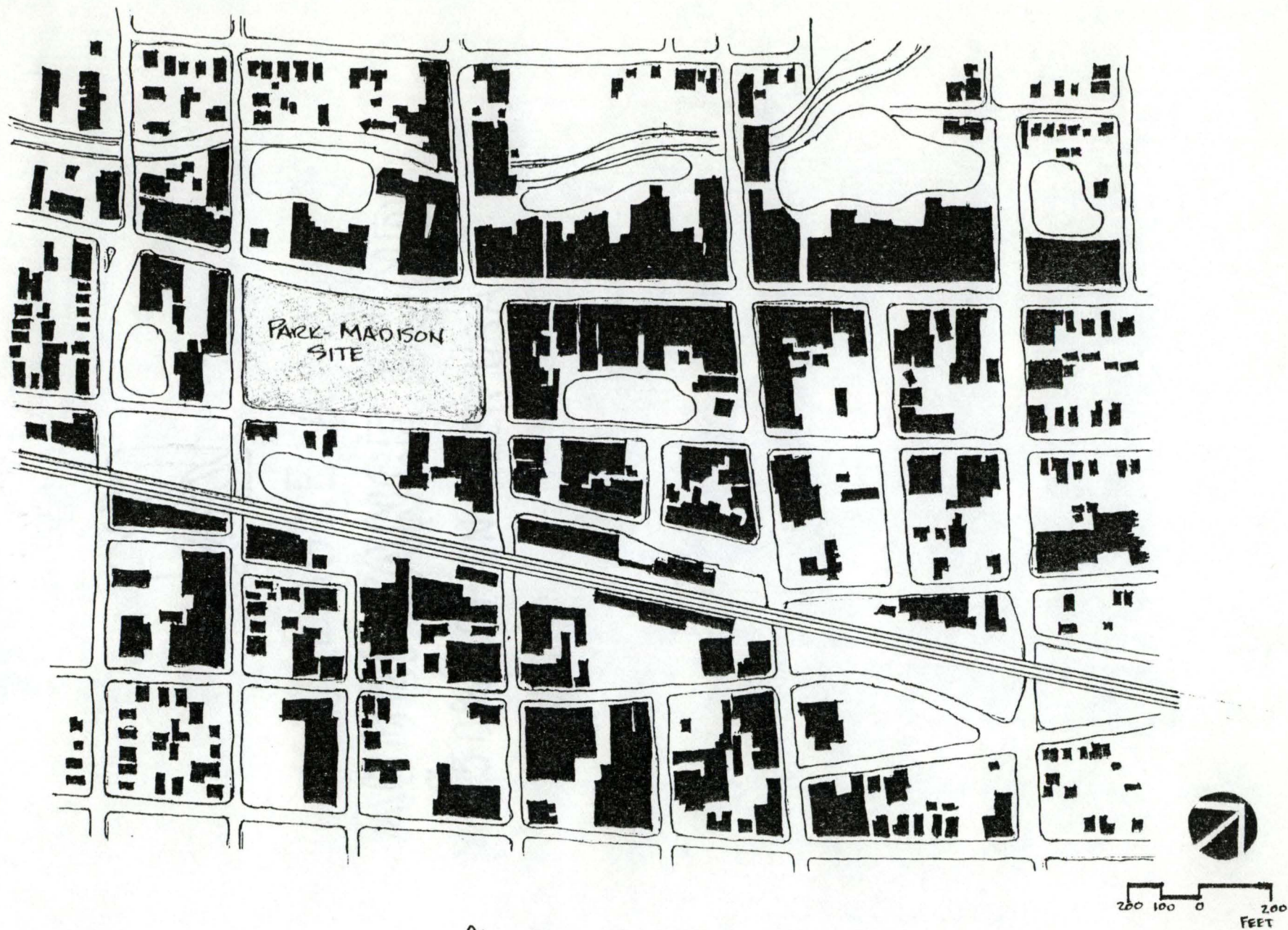


fig. 16. SOLID/VOID RELATIONSHIPS.



The vacancy rate in downtown Plainfield is currently around 14%, with several of these vacancies occurring along Front Street across from the Park-Madison site (see fig.17). It is anticipated that positive development of this renewal site will stimulate economic activity sufficient enough to attract commercial tenants to these buildings.

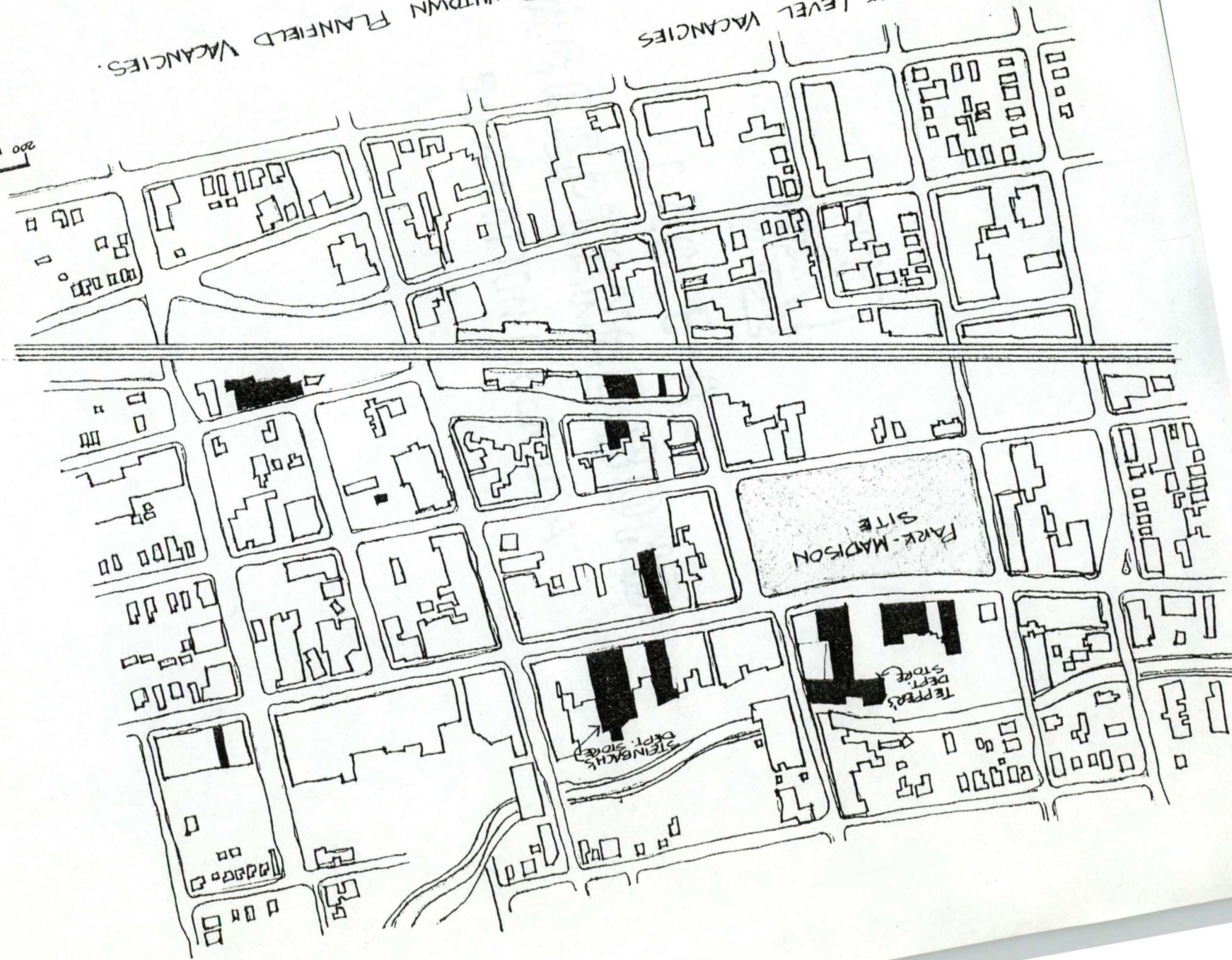
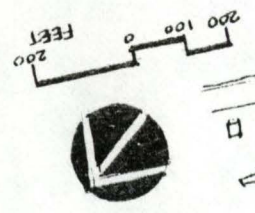
As we examine the West Front Street edge of the Park-Madison site, we see that vacancies do indeed dominate the structures away from the Somerset Street corner. In addition, there is a large gap next to the old Tepper's building (where a Bell Telephone office building had burnt down) that leads back to the rear parking area. There seems to be an opportunity here to use this gap as a positive connection between the Park-Madison development and the Green Brook. The predominant building material is brick, and the various colors and tones offer a refreshing variety. The number of large trees here can also help to provide a refreshing atmosphere. A bus stop is located near the Madison Avenue corner.

Across Park Avenue, we see the refurbished Savings Bank of Central



fig. 17. DOWNTOWN PLAINFIELD VACANCIES.

STREET LEVEL VACANCIES





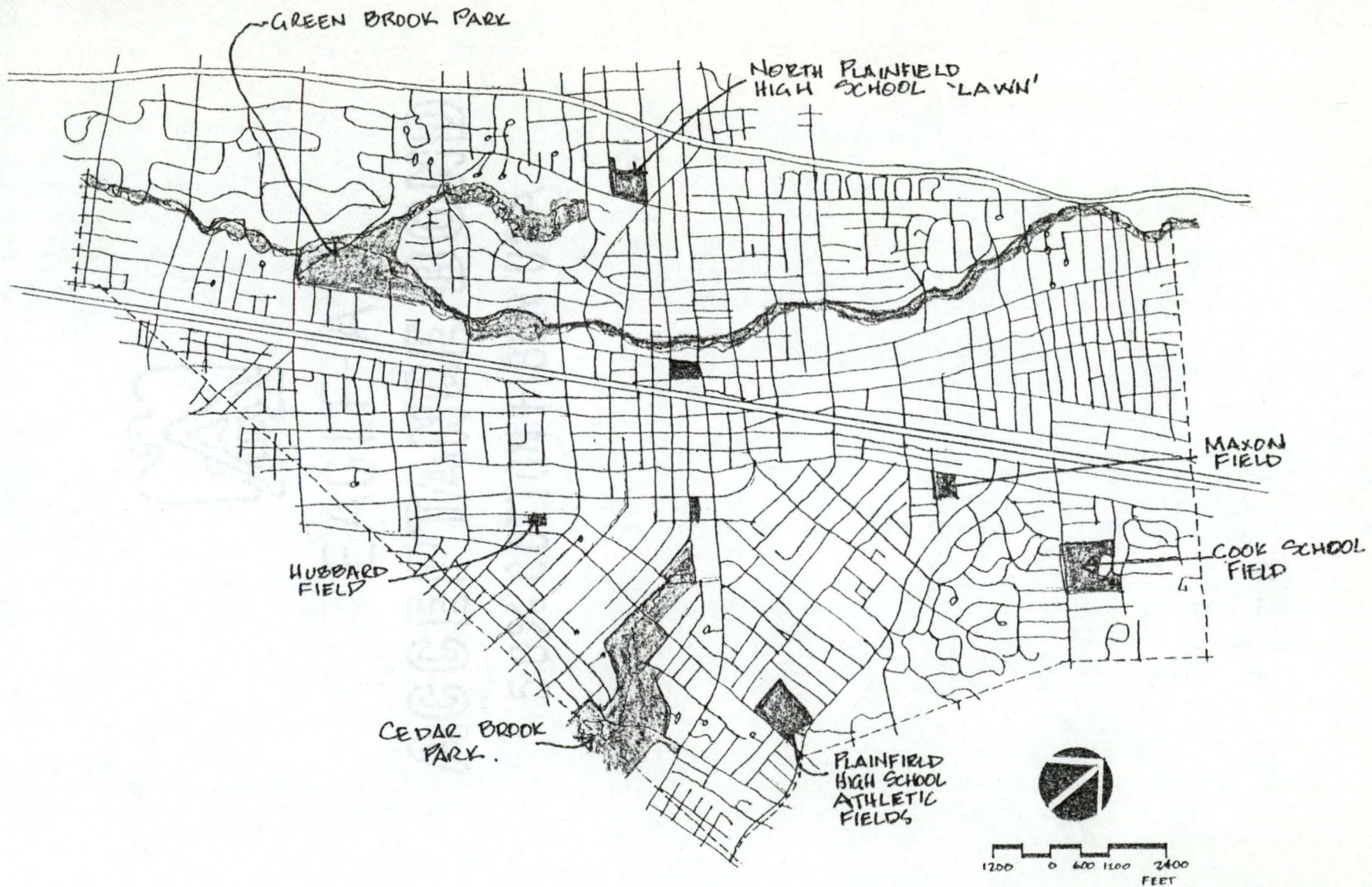


fig. 18. PUBLIC GREENSPACE.



Jersey (a particularly bad example of the City's Facade Remodelling Program) and several other bank and retail buildings. Brick once again is the dominant building material, but marble and aluminum panels also begin to see occasional use. A traditional touch of amenity is provided by the clock in front of the jewelry store. Awnings are used frequently and there are several large trees along this side of the site. A bus stop is located on the Front Street corner.

Across West Second Street to the south, we find the most erratic street edge of the site as the United National Bank parking lot and the Public Service Electric & Gas sub-station act as empty spots in the fabric. The stone United National Bank building forms a strong corner on Park Avenue, but the appliance store remains isolated, as does the two-story brick Spanish Community of Plainfield office on the Madison Avenue corner. Despite the hole in the building fabric, this effect is softened by the constant backdrop provided by the distant trees on the north side of the railroad tracks.

The edge of the site across Madison Avenue is particularly strong near West Front Street, but this sense is lost at the West Second Street corner. This predominantly residential street is dominated by a handsome four-story apartment building of brownish-yellow brick, with retail stores of a neighborhood character on the street level. These stores are currently all occupied.



urban  
revitalization



Before the specific problems of Plainfield may be dealt with, it would be helpful to discuss generally the problems of urban revitalization. A working definition of the problem of revitalization must first begin with the question of what has sapped the vitality of the city in the first place, that is, what needs to be corrected. This initial phase must start with some conception of the City's own future. Once this direction is identified, a systematic analysis of the component elements of the city should be made. This will indicate which elements need to be emphasized and which need to be de-emphasized. The final step becomes the particular design method in which the correction and adaptation of identified problems takes place. Here the introduction of new elements can also occur.

<sup>1</sup>Jacobs and Cox,  
among others.

In a broad sense, it seems that many urban theorists<sup>1</sup> regard the loss of a sense of "community" as a primary cause of the loss of vitality in an urban center. "Community" in this sense is defined as a feeling that exists among people as a result of a common future or goal, benefit or property, occasion or need, etc. Naturally, scale, in the form of population, provides some limits to the workability of the idea of community. The sense of community occurs



easily in small towns while in large cities, such as New York, smaller neighborhoods within the whole must be formed in order to allow the community to exist. It seems that Plainfield, as a small city, possesses a population small and stable enough to support a single unified community, with enough common factors to allow most residents to feel a part.

Once the initial loss of community takes place, the result is an increased alienation among neighbors who no longer know each other, nor care to. Self esteem and pride in the community is lost. Physical aspects of the community degenerate and this causes the cycle to move even more quickly. People stop using the streets, especially at night, and crime escalates. Local retailers lose business and the commercial trade stagnates. Self image of the city and property values drop sharply.

Plainfield is no longer a vital city, perhaps due to the fact that it has lost its sense of community - it is a city composed of fragmented, secondary relationships. The vital order, so necessary for the maintenance of the community/city, must be regained and

revitalization can only take place once the sense of community has been restored. I do not mean to suggest a return to a kind of "Main Street" of the past, but it does seem that in a small city such as Plainfield, some measure of community is needed for survival. In a segmented local society, we need to know what each other's needs, concerns and interests are.

In the case of Plainfield, The loss of community may in part be tied to the increase in the number of Black residents in the City, the racial riots of 1967, and the subsequent reaction and resentment by the White residents. This is not a purely racist reaction on their parts, but it seems to be primarily a practical one, stemming from lower property values, higher crime rates, dislike of change, loss of old friends, and the like.

If we can attack the loss of community as the primary reason for the lack of vitality in a particular urban area, how may the architect stimulate a regained sense of community? First of all, the architect must be sensitive to his place. He cannot revitalize a community, it is the residents themselves who must do this. Jane Jacobs tells



us that one reason why many cities are fragmented is that the personal relationships between the residents are fragmented, impersonal, and merely functional: the residents know each other in only one context or another. It seems that the architect can provide a place where people in the city can meet each other under circumstances different from those in which they would normally meet. As Jacobs' abundant examples show, a variety of contextual relationships can allow people to get to know each other.

Similarly, getting a broad variety of participants involved in the downtown scene would stimulate these new relationships, as would appropriate pedestrian amenities designed to encourage stopping, standing, sitting, window shopping, conversation, and the like. In Plainfield, the downtown improvement projects planned by the City, including the Facade Remodelling Program and the proposed street and lighting improvements, should not be discounted and should in fact be expanded as general improvements of the downtown area. It is also important that different participants are drawn to the downtown area at a variety of times, and any facilities proposed for the Park-Madison renewal site should take this into

account.

The economic revitalization of downtown Plainfield can be defined primarily as the resurgence of the local retail trade. By making the downtown streets and sidewalks more attractive and usable, potential consumers would be drawn into the area, creating more business for existing establishments and making existing vacancies more attractive to potential tenants. In a pedestrian shopping environment such as downtown Plainfield, it seems that considering these measures would go a long way in addressing the deficiencies brought to light by the Smith Report's Shopper's Survey.



case studies

## CASE STUDY A

Over-the-Rhine Pilot Center  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
Woollen Associates  
1975

ARCHITECT'S INTENTIONS: "to add the things people need in order to identify with a community- the social and recreational elements that bring people together...with a minimum disruption to the existing fabric."

CONCEPT: A complex of four buildings that intertwine with older buildings in the neighborhood. The new buildings are used to infill existing gaps on the street while creating semi-enclosed public green spaces on the inside.

URBAN RESPONSE: This design attempts to modestly fit in with the existing context, mainly through the use of materials and scale. As each building in the urban cityscape is different, the Pilot Center expresses its own individuality through the use of colorful graphics and the size and location of window and door openings.

ANALYSIS: In general, this seems to be a good project. The

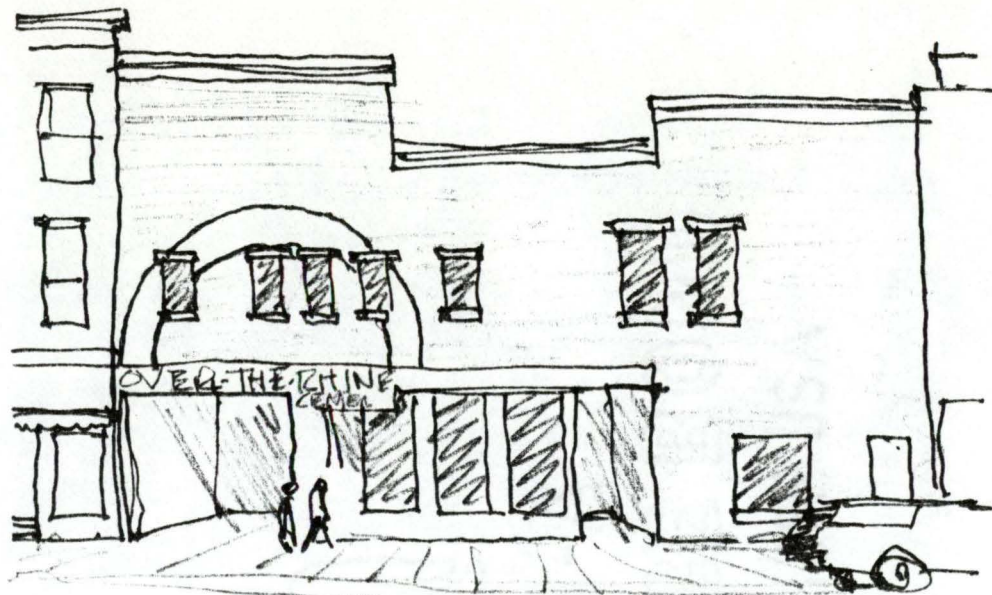


unpretentious nature of a community center is well expressed, as is the variety of activities inside. The integration of the new with the old, including the use of the local landmark (St. John's steeple) is admirable, providing the local residents with familiar objects and images.

Perhaps the best part of this project is the method by which it was designed: from a temporary office near the site. This allowed the architects to maintain close contact with the neighborhood and thus gave them a greater awareness of the residents' needs.

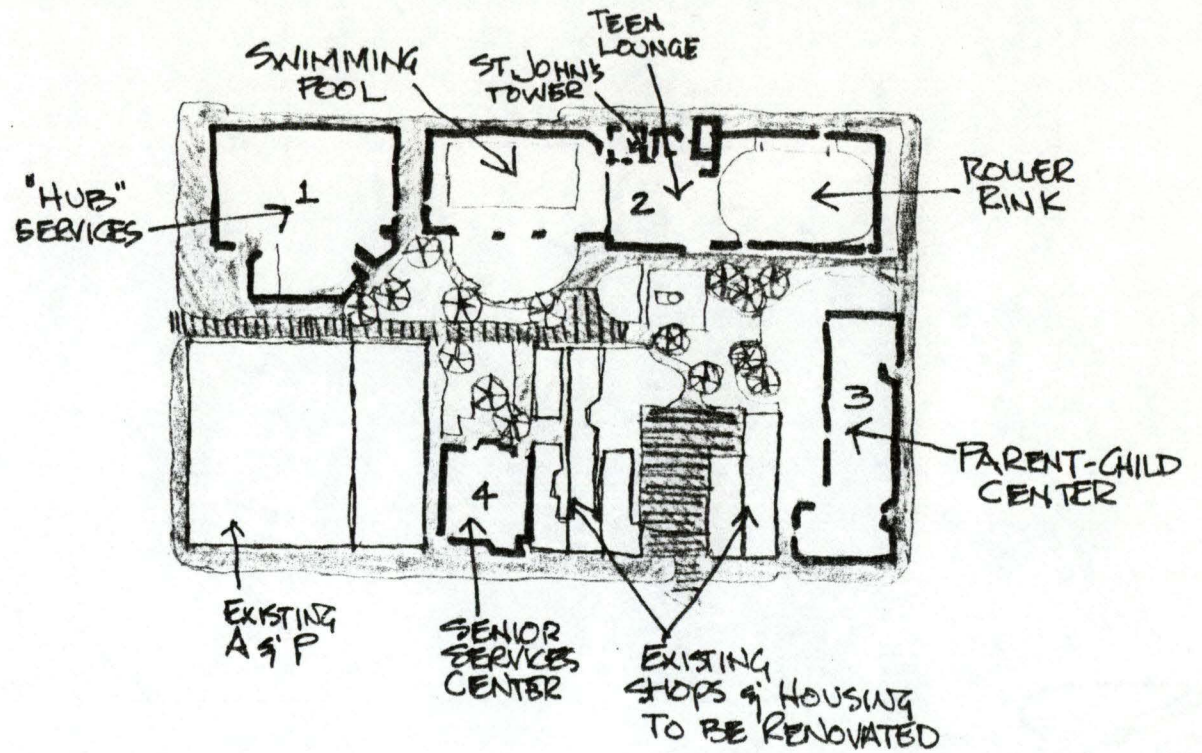
One question that arises is whether there is a potential crime problem in the inner courtyard. Without knowing more specific data about the area, however, this is difficult to tell.

Source: Hoyt, pp. 193-198.

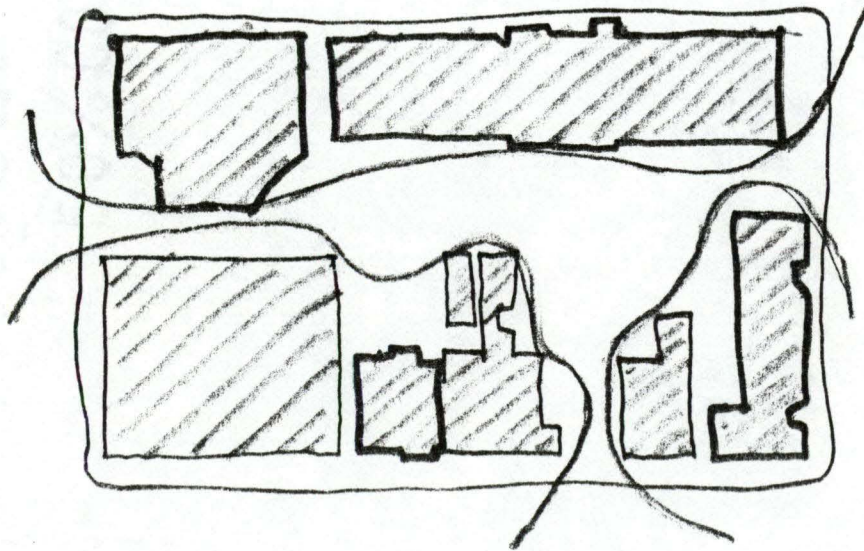


OVER-THE-RHINE - PILOT CENTER  
CINCINNATI, OHIO.





PEDESTRIAN ACCESS  
 AUTOMOBILE ACCESS



OVER THE RHINE - PILOT CENTER  
 CINCINNATI, OHIO.

## CASE STUDY B

The Dronten Agora  
Dronten, Holland  
Frank Van Klingeren  
1960

ARCHITECT'S INTENTIONS: To create an open building of a spontaneous nature. Seemingly "unfinished", the Center should be capable of constant adaptation and change.

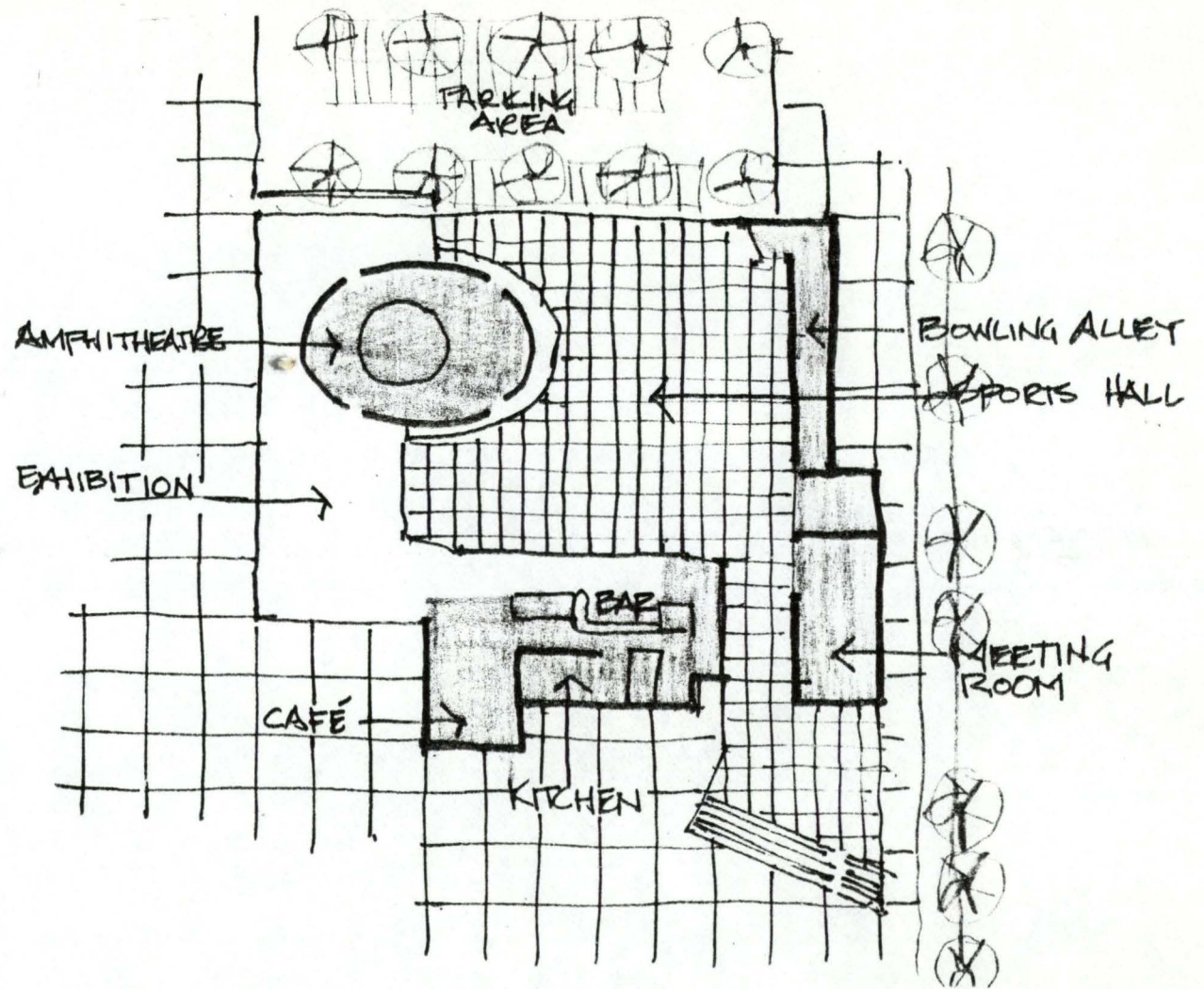
CONCEPT: As the name implies, the concept of this center is the ancient Greek agora, in which many diverse activities took place. This attitude of encouraging participant interaction is an important one in the development of a community Center.

ANALYSIS: What is notable about the Dronten Agora is its ability to house an extraordinary number of diverse activities in a single large space. The flexible open plan is essentially a glass box, with the 350-700 seat auditorium, restaurant/bar, and service areas occurring within the space as solid sculptural objects. The open nature of the space, however, at times requires strict scheduling of activities to avoid particular conflicts (as, for example, with concurrent use of the main space by both sports



activities and retail activities) and this apparent rigidity seems to work against the main idea of flexibility.

Source: Sternberg, pp. 168-9.



THE DRONTEN AGORA  
DRONTEN, HOLLAND.



CASE STUDY C

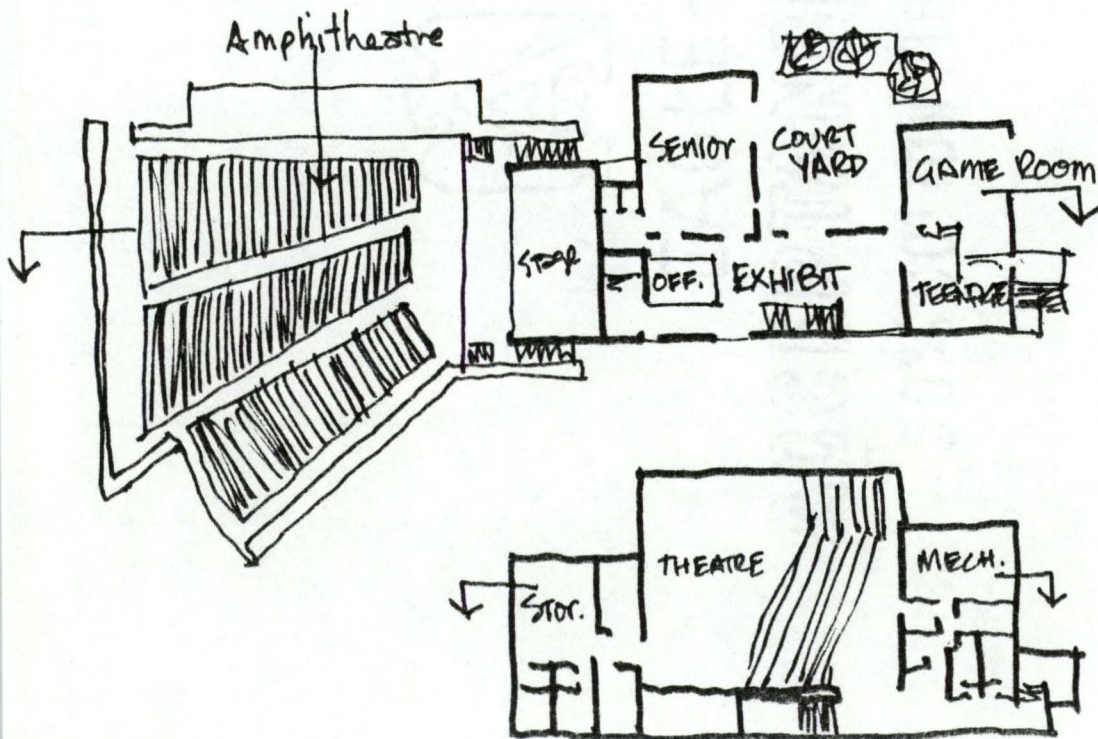
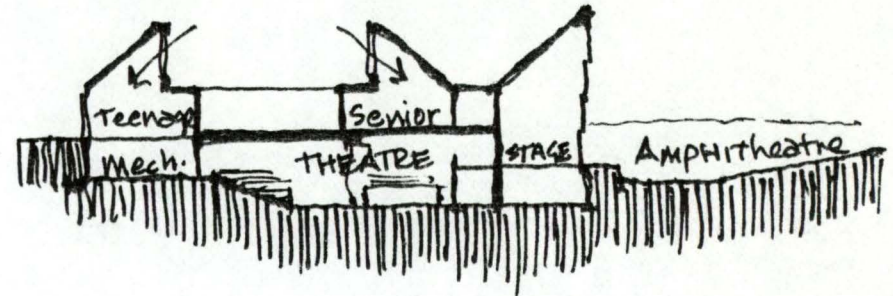
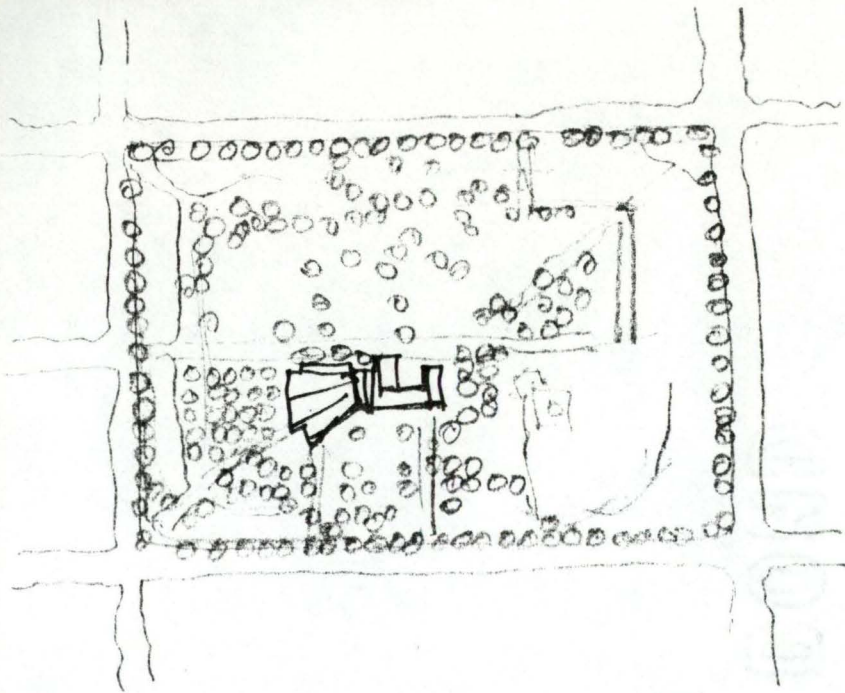
Tompkins Park Recreation Center  
Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York  
Hoberman and Wasserman  
1974

ARCHITECT'S INTENTIONS: To create an expansive facility responsive to its patrons- "a cultural and recreational center for users of all ages."

CONCEPT: Located within an existing urban park, the building is placed to emphasize the original plan's diagonal axis. To minimize the impact of a large building in a neighborhood park, over half of the facility is built underground.

ANALYSIS: It seems that the compactness and economy of this solution, while accomodating several activities, is valuable. The integration of interior and exterior spaces is also admirable, as is the use of skylights to bring natural light into the lounge areas. The use of some of the outdoor space as an amphitheatre is an intriguing idea with some potential.

Source: Hoyt, p. 178; Sternberg, pp. 294-5.



TOMPKINS PARK RECREATION CENTER  
BEDFORD-STUYVESANT, NEW YORK.



CASE STUDY D

A Community Center: Little Havana  
Miami, Florida  
Roberto Luis Sotolongo  
1979

ARCHITECT'S INTENTIONS: To develop and encourage interaction between all the members of the community, while serving the social and cultural needs of the residents. A focal point for the community, the Center should provide a place for a wide variety of activities.

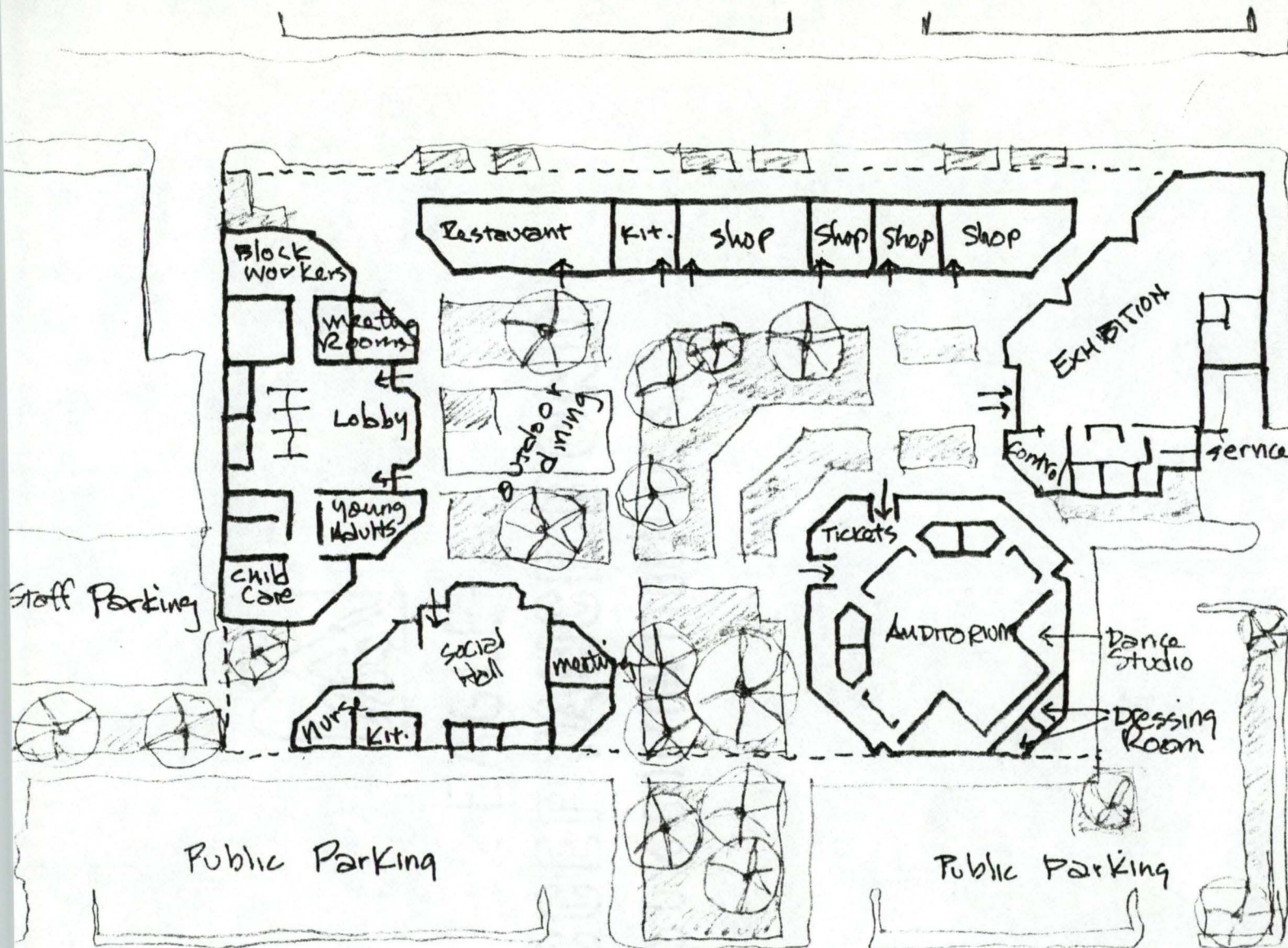
CONCEPT: " The main concept for the project was the creation of a central plaza with all community activities grouped around this main space."

URBAN RESPONSE: This project relates to its surrounding environment in a number of ways. First, the scale of the neighborhood is maintained by keeping the new building to a similar height (two to three stories) and by massing the five main activity components in a system consistent with the neighborhood context. Local materials (such as concrete block and stucco), color, and finishes were used to allow the new building to modestly fit within the local context.

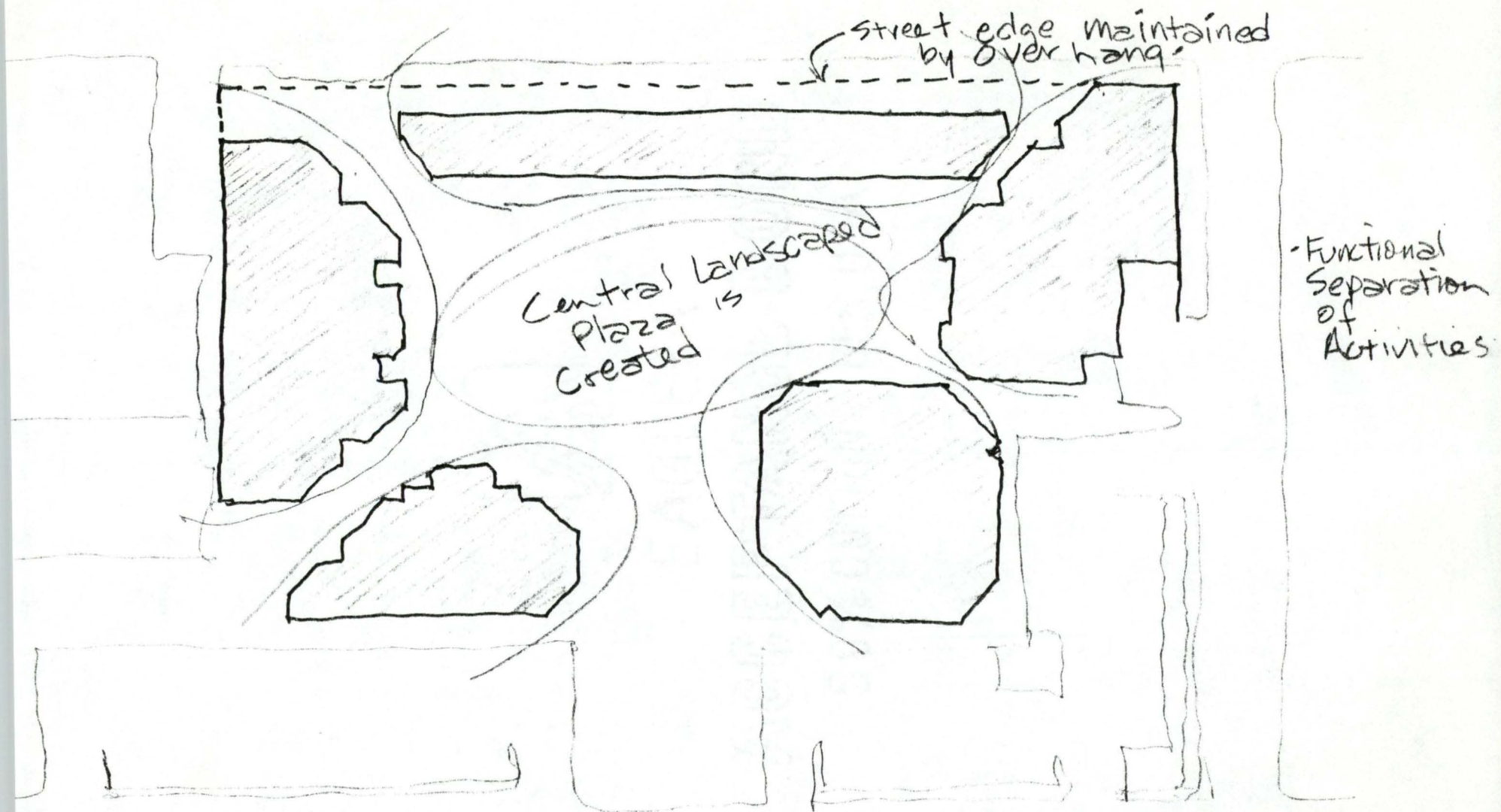
ANALYSIS: There are several positive aspects about this project. First, the way in which the street edge is maintained while providing pedestrian circulation in an humane manner is strong; the scale of the project seems appropriate. The manner in which activities are separated, allowing interaction to occur in the central plaza, seems to be a reasonable solution in the warm climate of Miami. While one activity is closed, others could remain in use and the plaza could serve quite adequately as a meeting, socializing, active space. The design of the plaza seems very nice, providing a high level of amenities and a variety of habitable, human, spaces. The location of activities on the site also seems appropriate.

Source: A Community Center: Little Havana, Miami, Florida  
a Terminal Project submitted to the Clemson University  
College of Architecture, May, 1979.





COMMUNITY CENTER - LITTLE HAVANA  
MIAMI, FLORIDA .



COMMUNITY CENTER - LITTLE HAVANA  
MIAMI, FLORIDA.



CASE STUDY E

Plainfield Plaza  
Plainfield, New Jersey  
Leo Kornblath Associates  
Project, 1980

ARCHITECT'S INTENTIONS: "To offer a building with urban convenience and suburban flair."

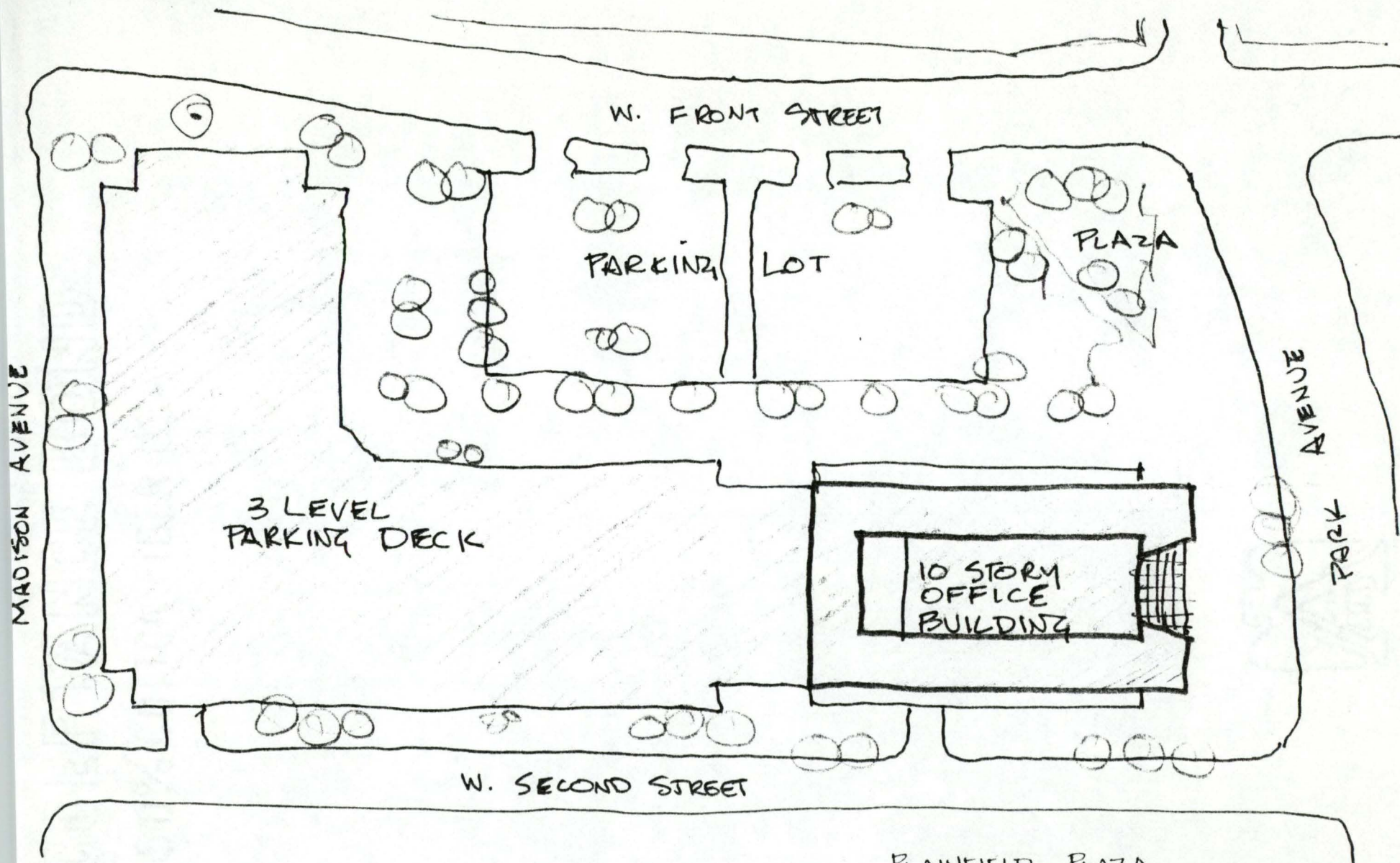
ANALYSIS: Despite the somewhat trite intentions (in all probability for marketing purposes), this project is important to look at since this is the current proposal for the Park-Madison site. In the original plan, the idea of creating a public plaza on the corner of Front Street and Park Avenue is a good one, although the effectiveness and impact seems to be diminished by the adjacent parking lot. In fact, the very location of the parking lot on West Front Street is cause for some concern, being an exact reversal of the traditional downtown Plainfield parking scheme. This results in the planned disintegration of the building line along West Front Street with the unfortunate result that the effect is indeed suburban. This seems directly opposed to the City's stated goals of visual harmony and downtown integrity. When Carlin-Atlas proposed to build retail outlets in a first phase, Kornblath's subsequent

proposal compromised the idea of a corner plaza without much gain in terms of the visual harmony of the downtown.

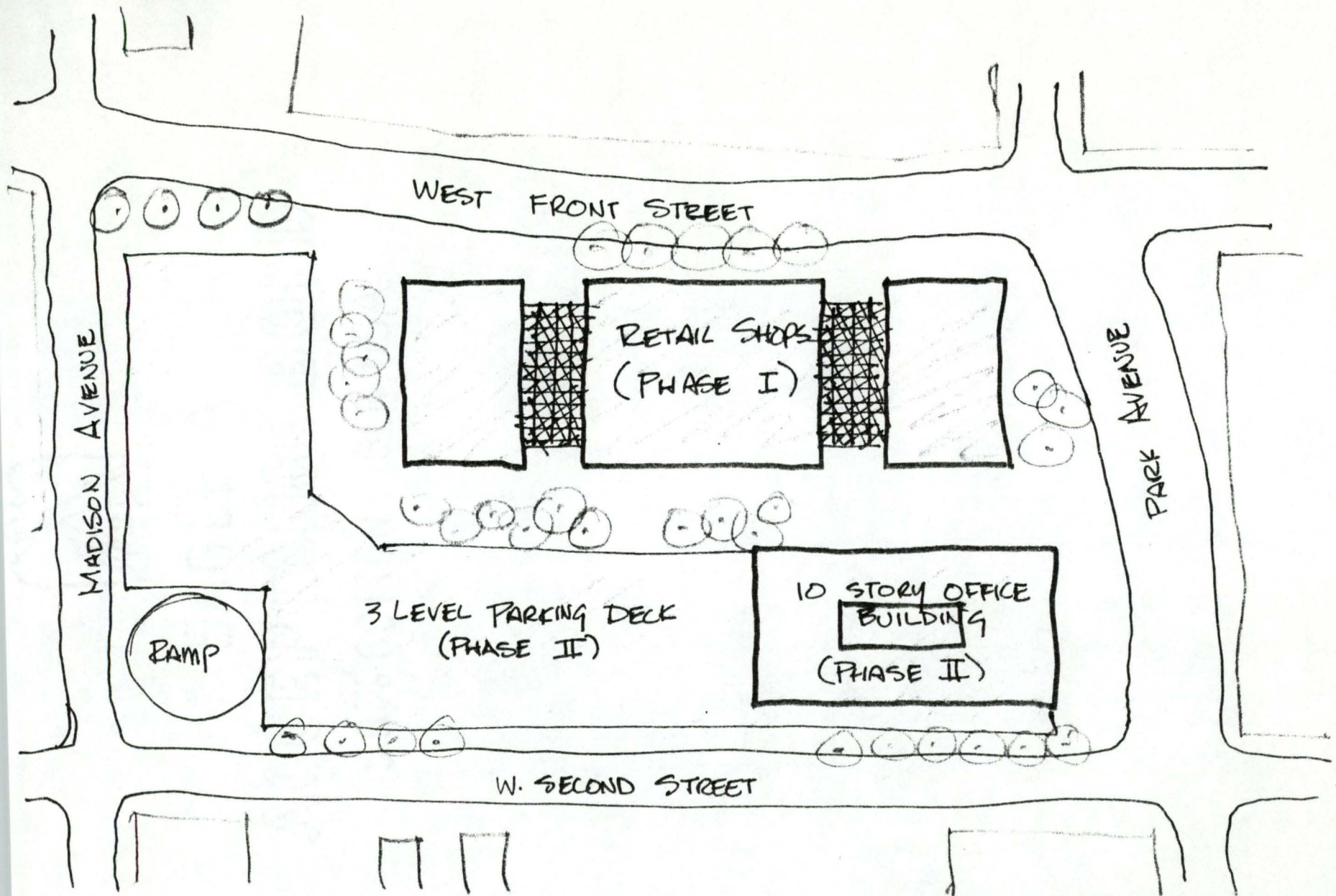
Despite attempts to break down the size of the buildings to a more human scale (for example, the use of the open arcade on the street level), the massive size of the project (ten stories) continues to work to the detriment of both marketing and, more importantly, the downtown cityscape. Again, it seems that there is a basic error in attitude of this building: trying to make Plainfield a regional center when it is not. The fact that the goal of locating a single tenant to prelease one-half of the office space has not been met in three years (not to mention the fifteen years previous to that) bears this out.

Source: Marketing Package, Plainfield Plaza.



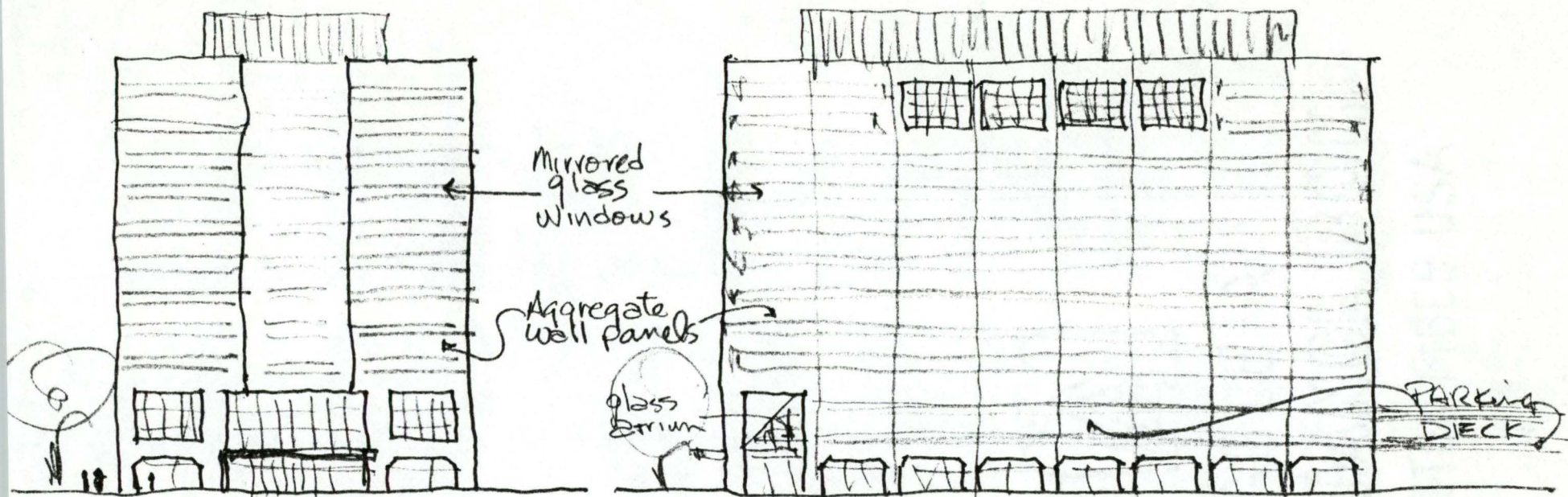


PLAINFIELD PLAZA  
PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY.  
ORIGINAL PLAN.



PLAINFIELD PLAZA  
PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY.  
SECOND PLAN.





Park Avenue Facade

WEST FRONT STREET Facade

PLAINFIELD PLAZA  
PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY.



activity  
description



## CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Current activities in downtown Plainfield seem to break down into two categories: daytime activities and nighttime/Sunday activities. The participants in the downtown scene come from all levels of the social spectrum in Plainfield.

During the day, shopping predominates; beginning in the mid-morning and continuing well into the afternoon. As we have seen, the shopping trade is for the most part (with the exception of Bamberger's Department Store) small scale and discount type outlets. In the Smith Report Survey, 73.1% of those surveyed were in Plainfield to shop.<sup>1</sup> The banking trade is also a draw into the downtown area during the day (14.1% in the survey). Additionally, beginning early in the morning many people can be seen on their way to work, not only in automobiles, but also waiting for buses on the downtown corners and walking. This type of activity continues throughout the day but naturally is busiest in the mornings and late afternoons.

After 3p.m., older school children and high school students join the downtown scene, many making the journey down Park Avenue from Plainfield High School. It seems as if the students are just looking

<sup>1</sup>Smith Report,  
Appendix p.1.

for something to do, because for the most part these participants simply walk up and down Front Street, in and out of stores, "hanging out", etc. The downtown merchants are fearful during this time of day of students loitering in front of their shops and so often can be found standing on the sidewalk in front of their stores. This situation is not by definition bad, however, as it indicates a sign of life and thus some potential good.

The nighttime and Sunday activity in downtown Plainfield is sparse, with few stores open during these hours. Of the nighttime draws, the restaurants in the City have patrons who are forced to park in lighted lots directly adjacent to the restaurant, go in and dine, come back to their cars and leave, without any chance of enlivening or further experiencing the area. The bars are few and exist for the most part on the side streets, again with little opportunity for influencing the main street life. The two movie theaters in town do not draw very large audiences, showing either martial arts adventure films or XXX pornography.



## PROJECTED ACTIVITIES

As mentioned in the section above concerning urban revitalization, downtown Plainfield needs activities that will give a wide variety of citizens a reason for being downtown and will spur a variety of meaningful social contacts among City residents. The proposed activities that will meet these needs are classified into the following groups: Commercial, Social/Recreational, and Cultural.

It is foreseen that the shopping trade will continue to be the mainstay of the downtown activity. In order for the commercial district to regain its balance, however, it is necessary to attract more shoppers into the downtown. It seems that these patrons can be found within the City of Plainfield itself. Drawing from within the City, the deadly competition with the regional shopping centers would be avoided and a strong local base of support would be redeveloped. Increased commercial activity would create more action on the downtown sidewalks and would encourage more shopkeepers to remain open at night. Increased nightlife would also discourage crime. In addition, existing retail vacancies would become more valuable and attractive to potential tenants.

In the Social/Recreational activity category, the needs of several citizen groups must be addressed. The students who currently populate the downtown sidewalks should be given a reason for being there. This is not to suggest that they should be taken off of the street, but rather that they should have a more constructive occupation than "loitering". This would also help to alleviate some of the animosity toward the students felt by the merchants.

Senior citizens currently have a center on Front Street, but the location is in a storefront somewhat away from the center of downtown activity. According to a spokesman, the existing facilities are somewhat "cramped and inadequate" and a move to a less isolating location would be desirable.

Day care services are currently offered by the S.C.O.P. office on West Second Street. The facilities here, however, are also considered inadequate and it is felt by S.C.O.P. that an expanded operation at the Park-Madison site would have a greater, wider ranging appeal. The new day care facilities would attract patrons from a more diverse racial/ethnic group.



Perhaps the most important social need of the downtown is some form of open, public space. Such a place would attract many of the downtown residents and should encourage sitting, talking, assembly, etc. An outdoor place could also be used by the Plainfield Arts Council during its annual Sidewalk Art Show and Sale, held each July.

In the cultural vein, several opportunities exist for the Park-Madison site. One is the New Jersey Theatre Forum which is currently operating out of inadequate quarters in the Plainfield Y.W.C.A.. Tim Moses, Director of the Forum, has expressed the desire for "our own theatre...right here on Front Street."<sup>1</sup> Such a theater could also be used by any of several musical organizations in Plainfield, (see fig. 19) such as the New Jersey Schola Cantorum and smaller ensembles of the Plainfield Symphony Orchestra, that currently operate away from the downtown area. The Plainfield Arts Council is very active within the City and Carolyn Lambert, Arts and Culture Coordinator for the Council, also feels that the City could support a cinema (if available at low cost to the public) that would show films of an artistic nature. Ms. Lambert further states that current plans to renovate the westbound railroad

<sup>1</sup>Prior, p.49.

Arioso Chamber Music  
Ars Musica Antiqua  
Barbershop Quartet of Plainfield/Somerset Hills  
Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church  
Friends of the Plainfield Public Library  
Historical Society of Plainfield and North Plainfield (Drake House)  
Lacy/Strom Dance Company  
M.U.S.I.C. Inc.  
New Jersey Schola Cantorum  
New Jersey Theatre Forum  
Parish Players  
Plainfield Heritage  
Plainfield Outdoor Arts Festival  
Plainfield Regional Art Museum  
Plainfield Symphony Orchestra  
Plainfield Community Concerts  
Recreation Division of Plainfield  
St. Mary's Centennial Players  
YWCA

fig. 19. Plainfield Arts Council Participating Organizations



<sup>1</sup>Lambert Interview,  
December 23, 1981.

station as an artists' studio do not go far enough and that current demand for such rental space warrants at least ten more studio spaces of various disciplines.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Weinstein Interview,  
December 23, 1981.

The Plainfield Public Library has expressed the desire for a downtown annex. An annex of this type would serve as a reading room and would contain information on urban studies, Plainfield area history, and the like.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally there are several uses that may be considered potentially dangerous (see fig. 20). These are the uses that have either been attempted before with failure, such as new office or major retail space, or do not fit the needs and aspirations of the community, such as high rise luxury apartments. These incompatible uses must be avoided if a successful revitalization is to be achieved.

POTENTIAL USE	PREVIOUSLY ATTEMPTED	NEED	SYMPATHETIC TO COMMUNITY	COMPATIBLE SITE	"GOOD" DEVELOPMENT	COMMENTS
DAY CARE CENTER	○	●	●	●	●	EXISTING FACILITIES INADEQUATE
STUDENT CENTER	○	●	●	●	●	GREAT NEED IN TOWN/TWN
SENIOR CITIZEN CENTER	○	●	●	●	●	EXISTING FACILITIES INADEQUATE
HEALTH CARE CLINIC	○	●	●	●	●	GREAT NEED
LIBRARY ANNEX	○	●	●	●	●	EXPRESSED DESIRE
ART STUDIOS	○	●	●	●	●	EXISTING FACILITIES INADEQUATE
EXHIBITION GALLERY	○	●	●	●	●	EXISTING FACILITIES INADEQUATE
AUDITORIUM	○	●	●	●	●	MID-SIZE FACILITY
GYMNASTICS	○	○	●	○	○	HIGH SCHOOL FACILITIES ADEQUATE
SWIMMING POOL	○	○	●	○	○	EXISTING OUTDOOR FACILITIES OK
PLAYGROUND	○	●	●	●	●	GREAT NEED
ICE RINK	○	○	●	○	○	ADEQUATE FACILITIES IN GREEN BROOK AND CEDAR BROOK PARKS.
DANCE HALL/PANQUET ROOM	○	●	●	●	●	EXISTING FACILITIES INADEQUATE
BOWLING ALLEY	○	○	○	○	○	NO NEED
RIFLE RANGE	○	○	○	○	○	NO NEED
OPERA HOUSE	○	○	○	●	○	UNSYMPATHETIC TO COMMUNITY
SAUNA/MASSAGE	○	○	○	○	○	NO NEED
BARBER/BEAUTY SHOP	○	○	○	●	○	EXISTING FACILITIES ADEQUATE
LAUNDRY	○	○	○	●	○	
GROCERY STORE	○	○	○	●	○	
PHARMACY	○	○	○	●	○	
LOCAL RETAIL	●	●	●	●	○	BETTER ACCOMMODATED IN EXISTING FACILITIES (VACANCIES)
DEPARTMENT STORE	●	○	○	●	○	ATTEMPTED PREVIOUSLY W/O SUCCESS
DISCOUNT STORE	●	○	●	●	○	NO NEED
HOTEL/MOTEL	●	○	○	●	○	ATTEMPTED PREVIOUSLY W/O SUCCESS
RESTAURANT	○	●	●	●	●	SHOULD APPEAL TO WIDE VARIETY OF TASTES, BUDGETS, CAFE TYPE
OFFICE BUILDING	●	○	○	●	○	ATTEMPTED PREVIOUSLY W/O SUCCESS
KEY:	YES ●	NO ○				

Fig. 20. POTENTIAL USES FOR THE PARK MADISON SITE.



proposed  
needs

## SPATIAL REQUIREMENTS

Based upon the existing and projected activities discussed, the goal of a "good" development plan, and interviews with representatives of the City of Plainfield Planning Office and the involved organizations, we may begin to define a basic architectural program for the Park-Madison renewal site (see program, p. 74).

The outdoor space, or "Commons", should have a mixture of comfortable sub-spaces, with a fairly large gathering area and smaller seating and talking places. Amenities such as trees and other landscaping should not be discounted, as one of the appealing characteristics of the downtown Plainfield cityscape is the abundance of leafy trees. Working with the Commons will be a small indoor/outdoor restaurant or cafe, appealing mostly to the lunchtime crowd, but also operating at night. In addition to the seating areas, kitchen, toilet, storage, and waste removal areas will be provided.

The Auditorium should ideally seat 350 to 450 persons, acting as a midsize facility between smaller meeting places and the Plainfield High School Auditorium (which seats up to 1500 persons). The Auditorium should be capable of handling a variety of theatrical,



musical, and cinematic events. Patron service space for the Auditorium will include a comfortable lobby area with a ticket kiosk, coat check room, concessions sales area, and public toilets. Production areas of the theater include the backstage area (with a thirty foot ceiling), prop workshop and storage, five dressing rooms serving four or five actors each, two chorus rooms serving twenty actors each and doubling as meeting rooms, an actors' lounge, and an office for the stage manager. Additionally, four practice/dance rooms and three meeting/lecture rooms are to be provided, along with an office for the New Jersey Theatre Forum.

The main components of the Fine Arts and Crafts facility are the commercial Gallery, which should be capable of accomodating both hanging and sculptural exhibits, and the Professional Studios, which should be flexible, having private rental studio spaces and common Workshop space. In conjunction with the Gallery will be a large work room and storage area and a cashier's area. Artists renting studio space can expect secured storage, a comfortable lounge, and toilet facilities. Offices for the Plainfield Arts Council will also be provided in the facility, including a general office, meeting room and storage room.

Youth services will be divided into two component areas: Day Care facilities and a Student Center. The Day Care facility will accomodate approximately twenty-five to thirty children under five years of age in a main Activity Room, art area, blocks area, tutoring/quiet area, and outdoor play area. Toilets, coat storage, and secured storage will also be provided. The Student Center, serving students of all age groups, will of a Lounge/Game Room, supervised kitchen facilities, an Arts and Crafts room with storage, a meeting room, Administration area, general storage, and toilet facilities. Outdoor recreation areas for basketball and other sports will also be provided.

Senior citizens can expect a Lounge, a small Dining Room, and kitchen to serve lunches, a quiet Reading Room and an Arts and Crafts room with storage. An Administration area will be provided, along with a check-in area, general storage, and toilet facilities.

The Health Clinic will serve the lower incommed residents of the city, providing low cost health care and treatment. Included in this facility will be a large Waiting Room with Receptionist area,



Intake Screening and X-ray Rooms, and two Diagnosis and Treatment Rooms. Administrative offices will be provided, along with toilets and secured storage.

The final component of this comprehensive project is the Downtown Public Library Annex which will consist of a controlled Reading Room, Reference area, general Stacks, a meeting room, an Audio/Visual Aids Room, and toilet facilities. A Staff Area will also be provided with secured storage.

<u>PROGRAM</u>	<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>AREA (SQ.FT.)</u>
OUTDOOR COMMONS	-Fairly large gathering area	
	-Smaller seating and talking areas	
		<hr/> TOTAL 100,000 sq.ft.
CAFE	-Indoor and outdoor seating	5,000
	-Kitchen	500
	-Toilets	300
	-Storage	250
	-Loading and Waste Removal	250
		<hr/> TOTAL 6,300 sq.ft.
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER	-Auditorium seating 350 to 450 persons	5,000
	-Lobby	5,000
	-Ticket Kiosk	100
	-Coat Check	300
	-Concessions Sales area	300
	-Public Toilets	1,000
	-Backstage Area	1,500



PROGRAMACTIVITYAREA (SQ.FT.)

-Prop Workshop	2,000
-Prop Storage	500
-Dressing Rooms 5 @ 120 sq.ft.	600
-Chorus Rooms 2 @ 300 sq.ft.	600
-Actors' Lounge	500
-Stage Manager's Office	450
-Practice/Dance Rooms 4 @ 375 sq.ft.	1,500
-Meeting/Lecture Rooms 3 @ 250 sq.ft.	750
-New Jersey Theatre Forum Office	250
-Other Toilets	900

---

TOTAL 21,250 sq.ft.

FINE ARTS AND  
CRAFTS CENTER

-Commercial Gallery	4,000
-Cashier	200
-Work Room and Storage	1,400
-Professional Studios	
-Private Rental Studios 12 @ 240 sq.ft.	2,880
-Common Workshop Area 2 @ 1500 sq.ft.	3,000

PROGRAMACTIVITYAREA (SQ.FT.)

-Artists' Lounge

1,200

-Secured Storage

650

-Toilets

650

-Plainfield Arts Council Offices

600

-Meeting Room

500

-Storage

250

---

TOTAL 15,330 Sq.ft.YOUTH CENTER

-Day Care Center

-Main Activity Room

300

-Art Area

150

-Blocks Area

80

-Outdoor Play Area

1,400

-Tutoring/Quiet Area

160

-Teacher/Storage Room

80

-Coat Storage

160

-Toilets

80

-Student Center

-Lounge/Game Room

650



PROGRAMACTIVITYAREA (SQ.FT.)

-Storage	80
-Kitchen	150
-Arts and Crafts	240
-Arts and Crafts Storage	80
-Meeting Room	300
-Administration	700
-General Storage	300
-Toilets	300

---

TOTAL 5,210 sq.ft.

SENIOR CITIZENS  
CENTER

-Lounge	700
-Dining Room	450
-Kitchen	150
-Check-in	150
-Reading Room	700
-Arts and Crafts	300
-Arts and Crafts Storage	150
-Administration	450

PROGRAMACTIVITYAREA (SQ.FT.)

-Storage

300

-Toilets

300

---

TOTAL 3,650 sq.ft.

## HEALTH CLINIC

-Waiting Room

700

-Receptionist

150

-Toilets

300

-Storage

450

-Intake Screening

150

-X-Ray

150

-Diagnosis and Treatment 2 @ 150 sq.ft.

300

-Administration

300

---

TOTAL 2,500 sq.ft.DOWNTOWN PUBLIC  
LIBRARY ANNEX

-Reading Room

700

-Reference Area

300

-Stacks

1,400

-Meeting Room

300



PROGRAMACTIVITYAREA (SQ.FT.)

-Audio/Visual Aids

300

-Staff Area

300

-Storage

150

-Toilets

300

---

TOTAL 3,750 sq.ft.PROGRAM SUMMARY

CAFE

6,300

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

21,250

FINE ARTS AND CRAFTS CENTER

15,330

YOUTH CENTER

5,210

SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER

3,650

HEALTH CLINIC

2,500

DOWNTOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY ANNEX

3,750

---

TOTAL 57,990 sq.ft.  
BUILDING  
AREA

## SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Due to the wide variety of functions, it is critical that some means of organization be used to coherently tie the complex together. Thus, the concept becomes a two part site upon which the Commons becomes a major green space on the prime corner of West Front Street and Park Avenue where it can serve prominently as the main entrance to the new facilities. The other half of the site serves as the antithesis of the Commons: a hard, built plaza around which the buildings are grouped. The street edges are thus maintained, with passageways and openings allowing access to the interior plaza. Working off of this main plaza are a series of secondary spaces from which access to individual buildings is gained. (see Concept drawings in the Architectural Solution). All buildings are also accessible from the street.

In terms of location of the various functions on the site, it seems that such cultural facilities as the Auditorium and the Gallery would benefit from a traditional public location fronting upon West Front Street. The outdoor seating of the cafe is ideally suited to the existing vacant lot across West Front Street from the site, providing a new use for a hole in the fabric, and thus the physical



restaurant facilities could easily be fitted into the adjacent vacant building.

The remaining facilities, the Youth Center, Senior Citizens Center, Health Clinic, and Downtown Public Library Annex, are all suited to the generally quieter and more residential area of the site along Madison Avenue and West Second Street. The most public of these, the Library Annex, is also best located adjacent to the Commons.

design  
proposal



The basic approach to the architectural solution that I have set up is of a broad nature; that is, the attempt is made to tie the proposed facilities into the existing pattern and fabric of downtown Plainfield. I feel no restrictions whatsoever in confining the project to the boundaries of the Park-Madison renewal site. Consequently, other existing "gray" areas near the site become integrated into the project and the intent of the proposal as a focus of revitalization becomes evident.

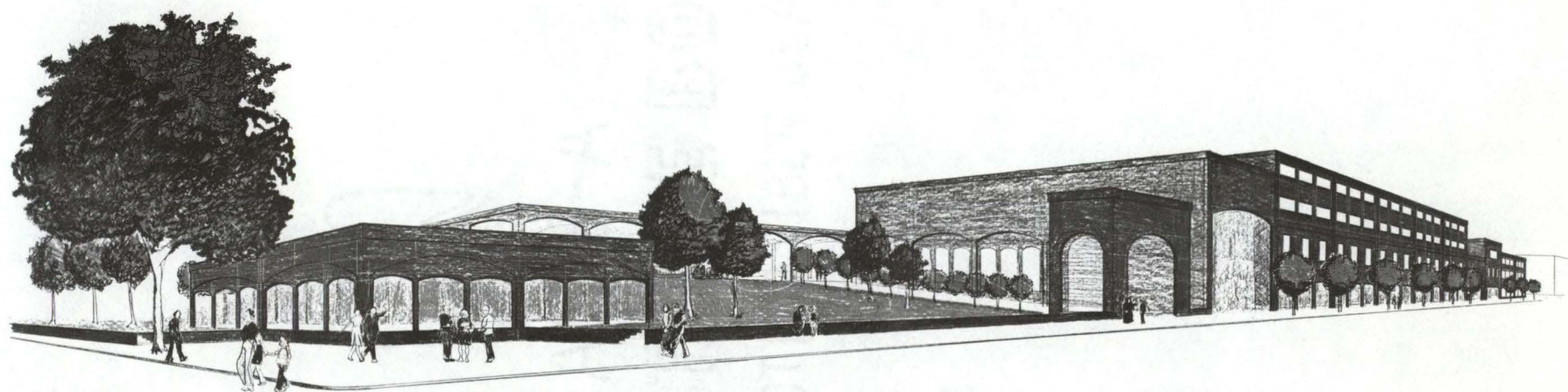
The basic part of the solution is the reestablishment of an original road, Compton's Alley, which once bisected the site. This linear element divides the site into two basic parts, a green Commons and a built plaza. These two components create a dialogue as described in the drawings. Although a linear element crossing the site, "Compton's Walk" becomes a means of connecting the two halves, the edge of transition.

As it crosses West Front Street, the walk passes through the outdoor seating of the cafe, leading to a newly developed greenway along the south bank of Green Brook, while across West Second Street

a new railroad transit center is established around the newly refurbished and relocated eastbound railroad station. In this way, more pedestrians are brought directly to the Commons and flow is allowed to develop across the site, as well as along its edges.

The buildings themselves are modest, yet indicate a special occurrence in the City. Formally, they each become a repeated element that steps around the built plaza and work together to enclose it, each adapting to fit its specific location and function. The segmental arch, a common element in downtown Plainfield, is used as a unifying device and lends a "civic" nature to the whole. It is an approach of integration.

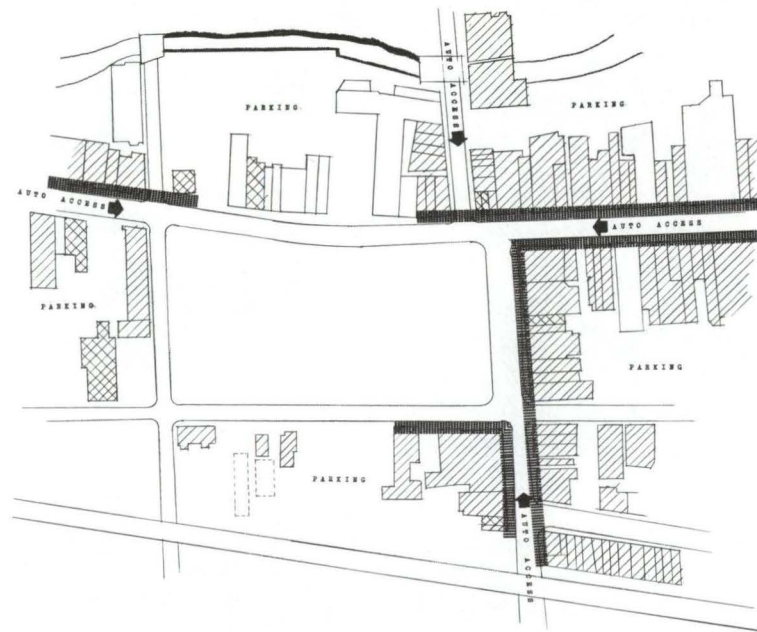




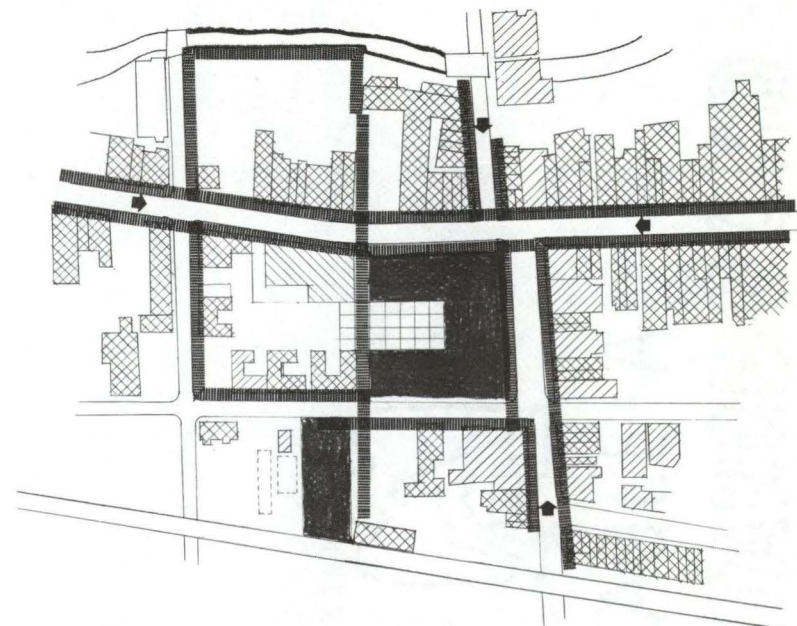
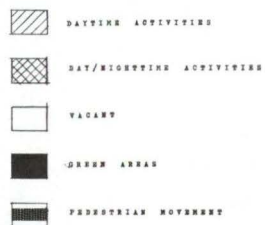
PLAINFIELD

COMMONS

Robert B. M. Spring '82.



## EXISTING

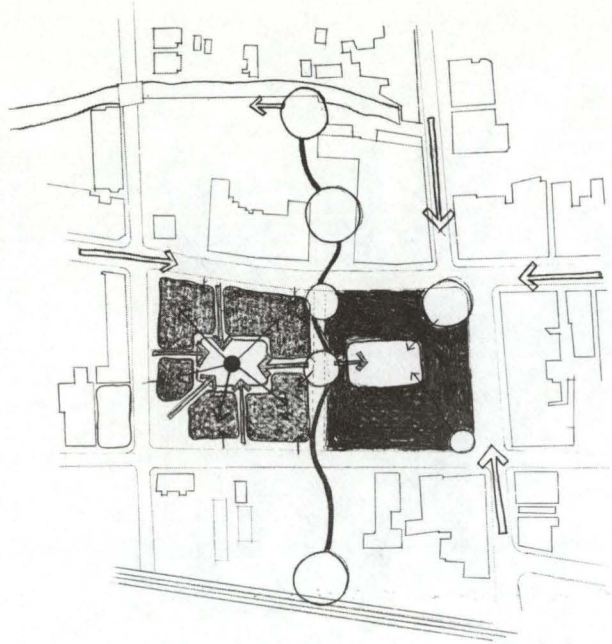


## PROJECTED



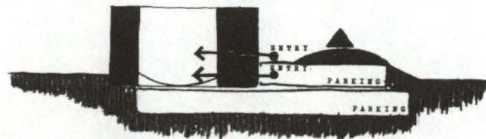
# SITE CONDITIONS





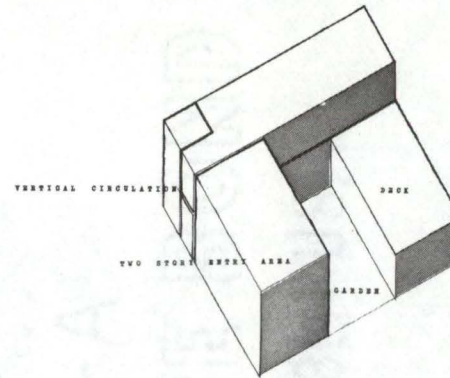
CONCEPT

HARD	SOFT
ENCLOSED	OPEN
INTROVERTED	EXTROVERTED
BUILT	NATURAL
CONCAVE	CONVEX
DOWN	UP
IN	OUT
DEPRESSED	ELEVATED

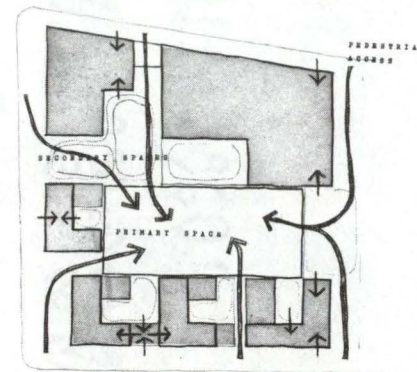


SECTION

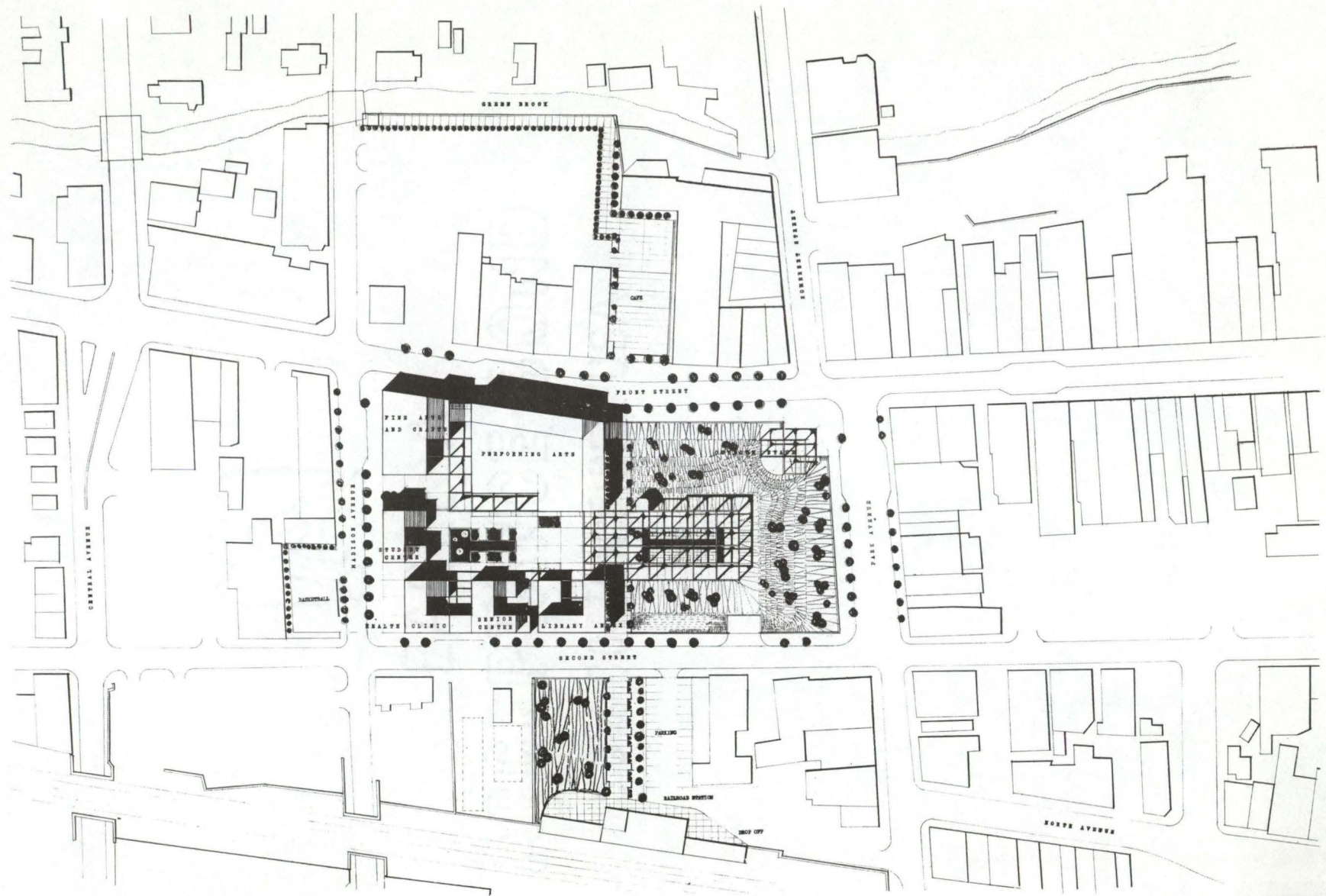
CONCEPT'S



VOLUMETRIC UNIT



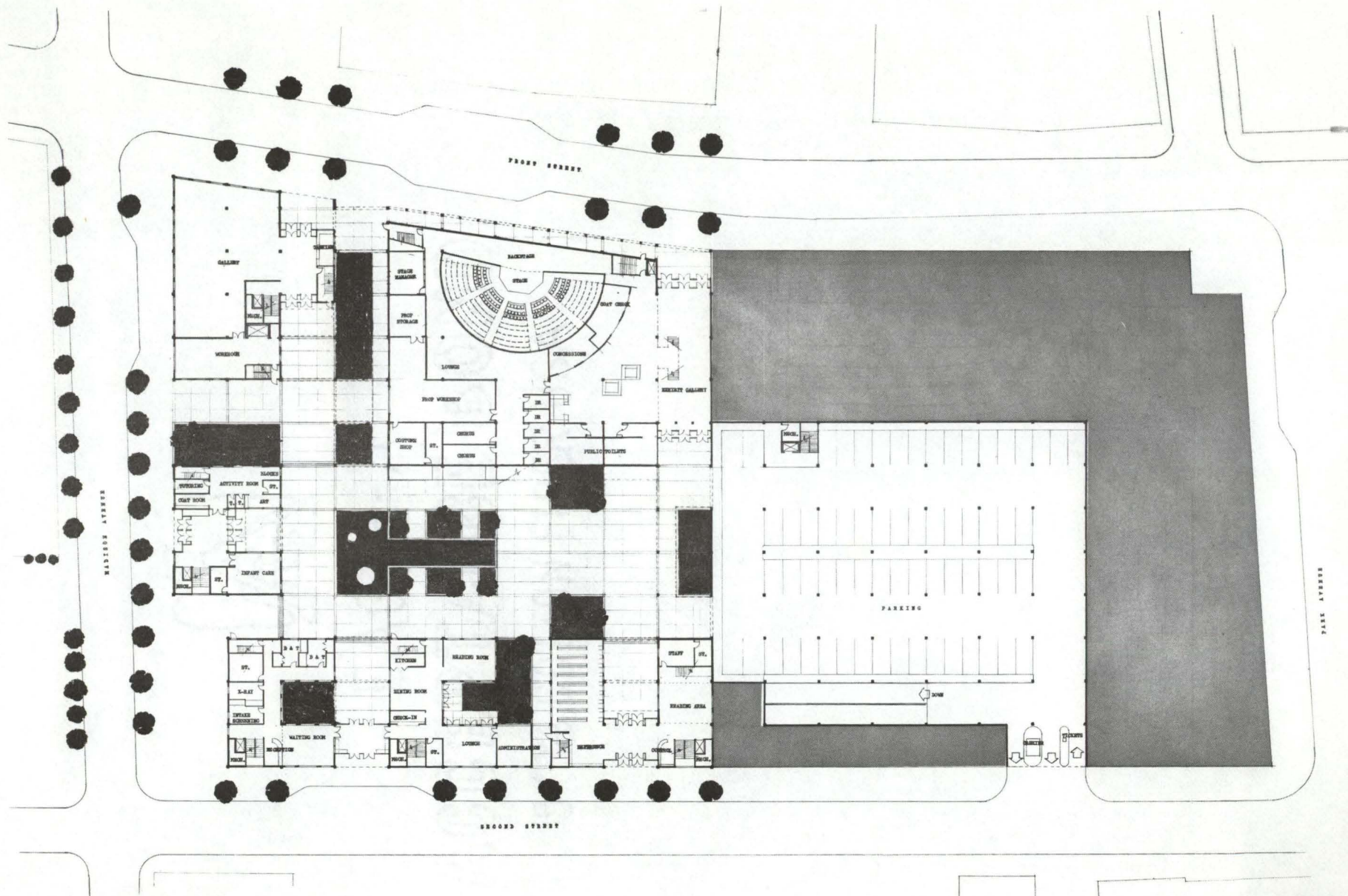
CIRCULATION



# SITE PLAN







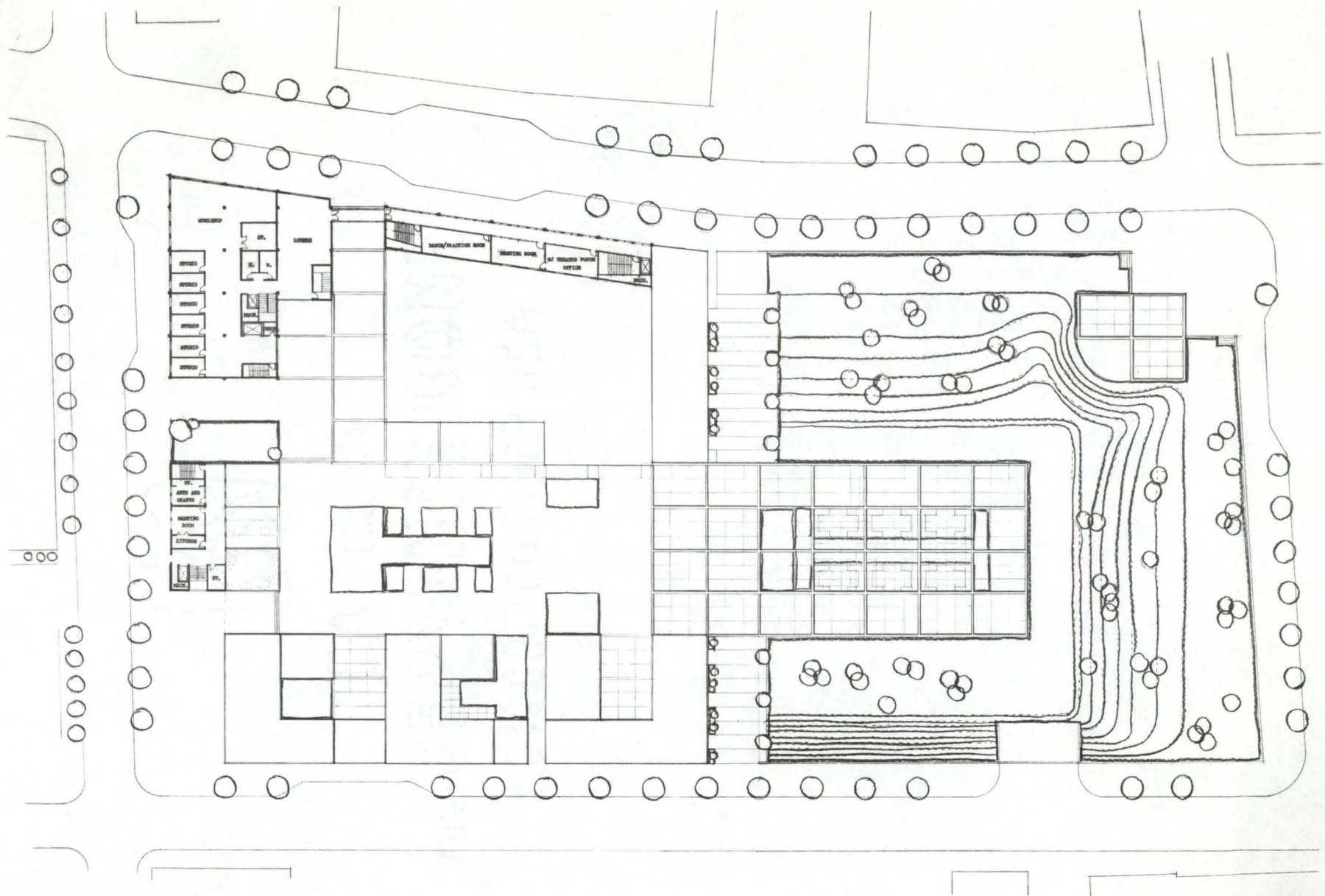
LEVEL 1





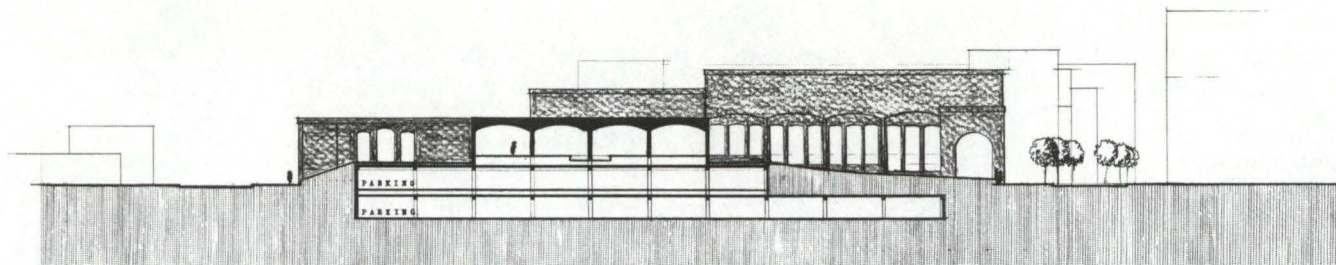




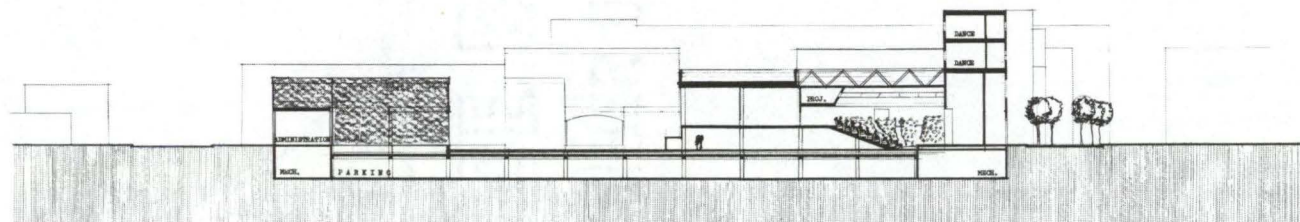


LEVEL 3

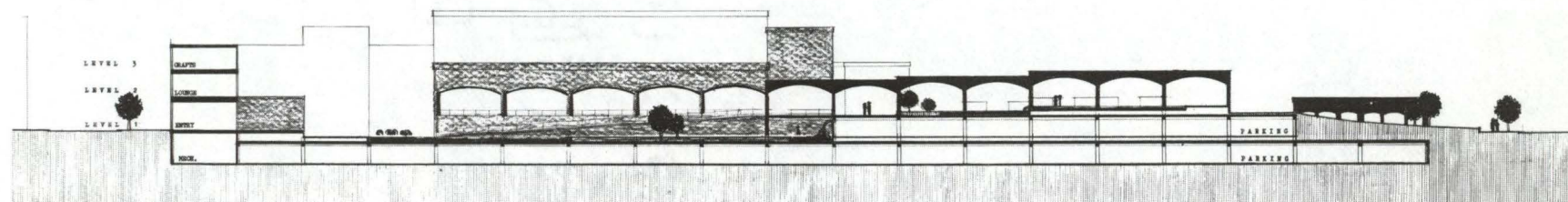




SECTION A-A

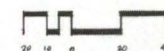


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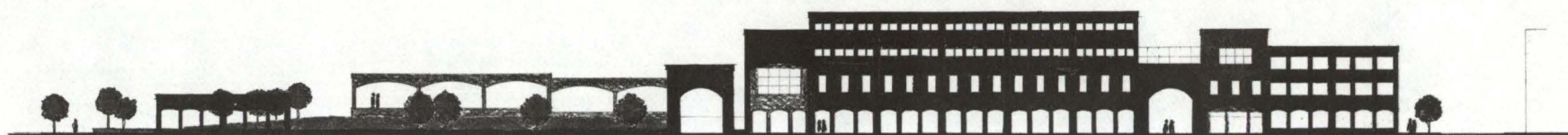


SECTION C-C

SECTIONS



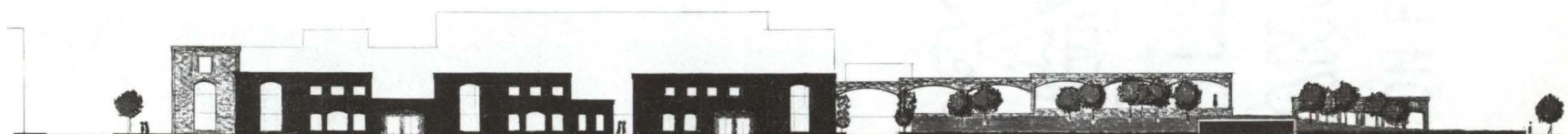




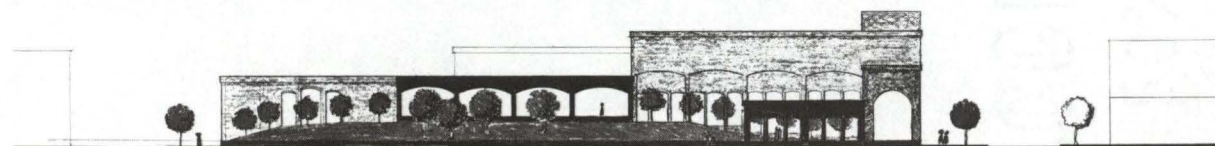
FRONT STREET



MADISON AVENUE



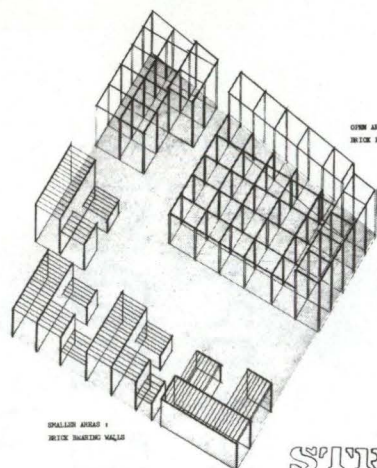
SECOND STREET



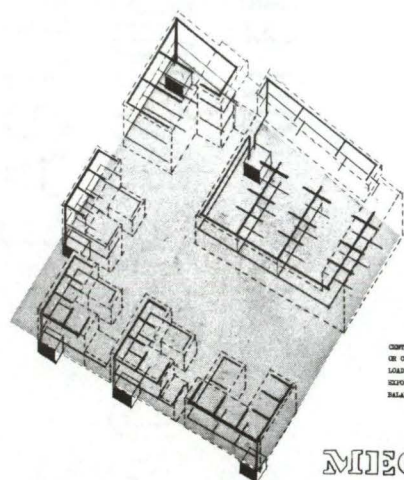
PARK AVENUE

FAÇADES



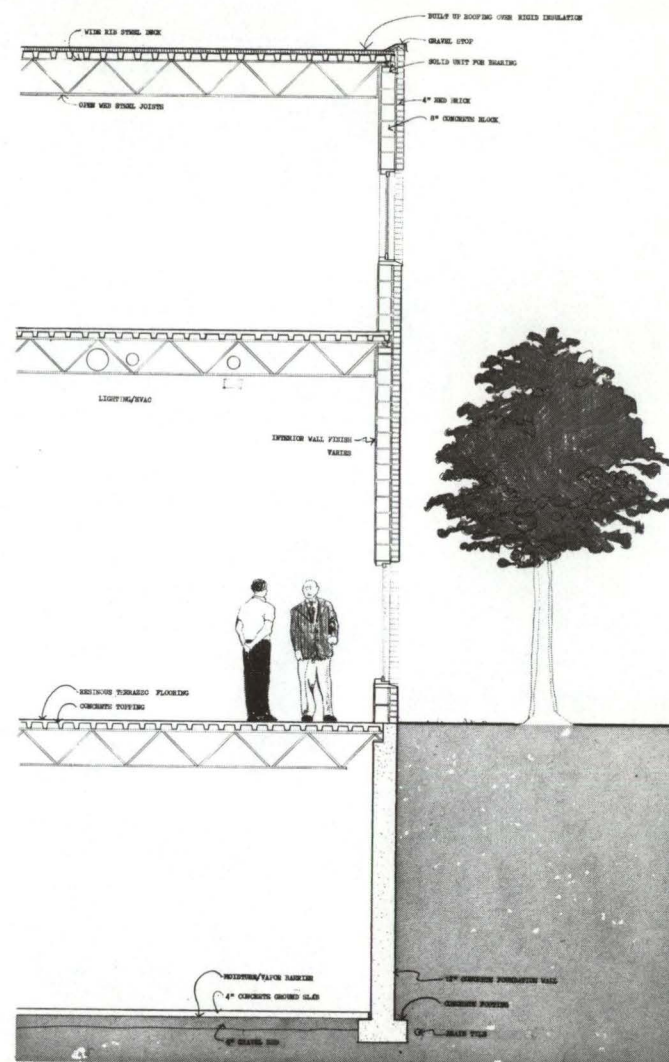


## STRUCTURE



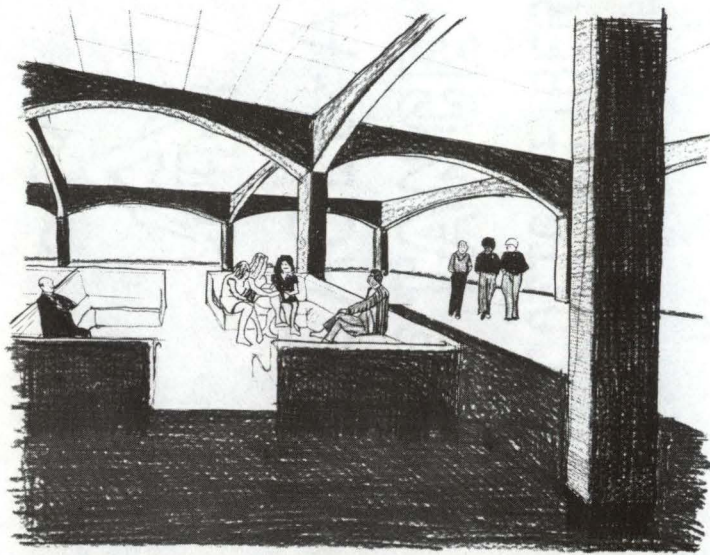
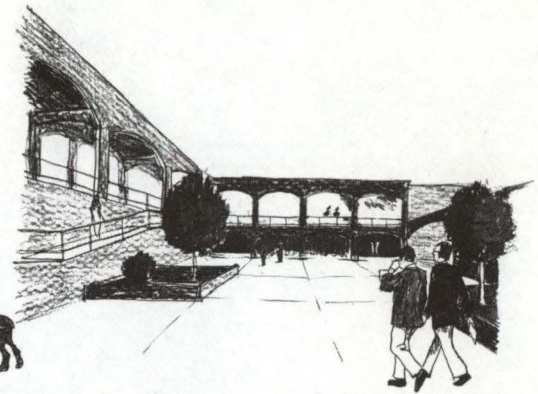
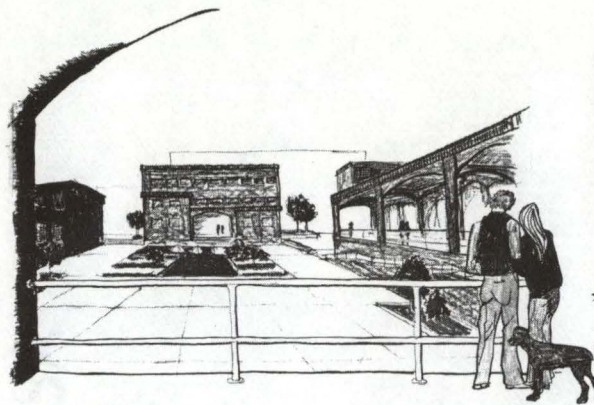
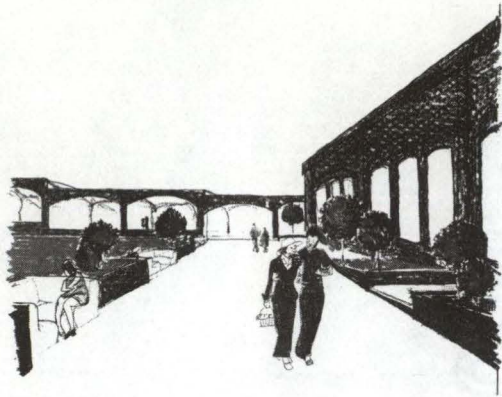
## MECHANICAL

# SYSTEMS



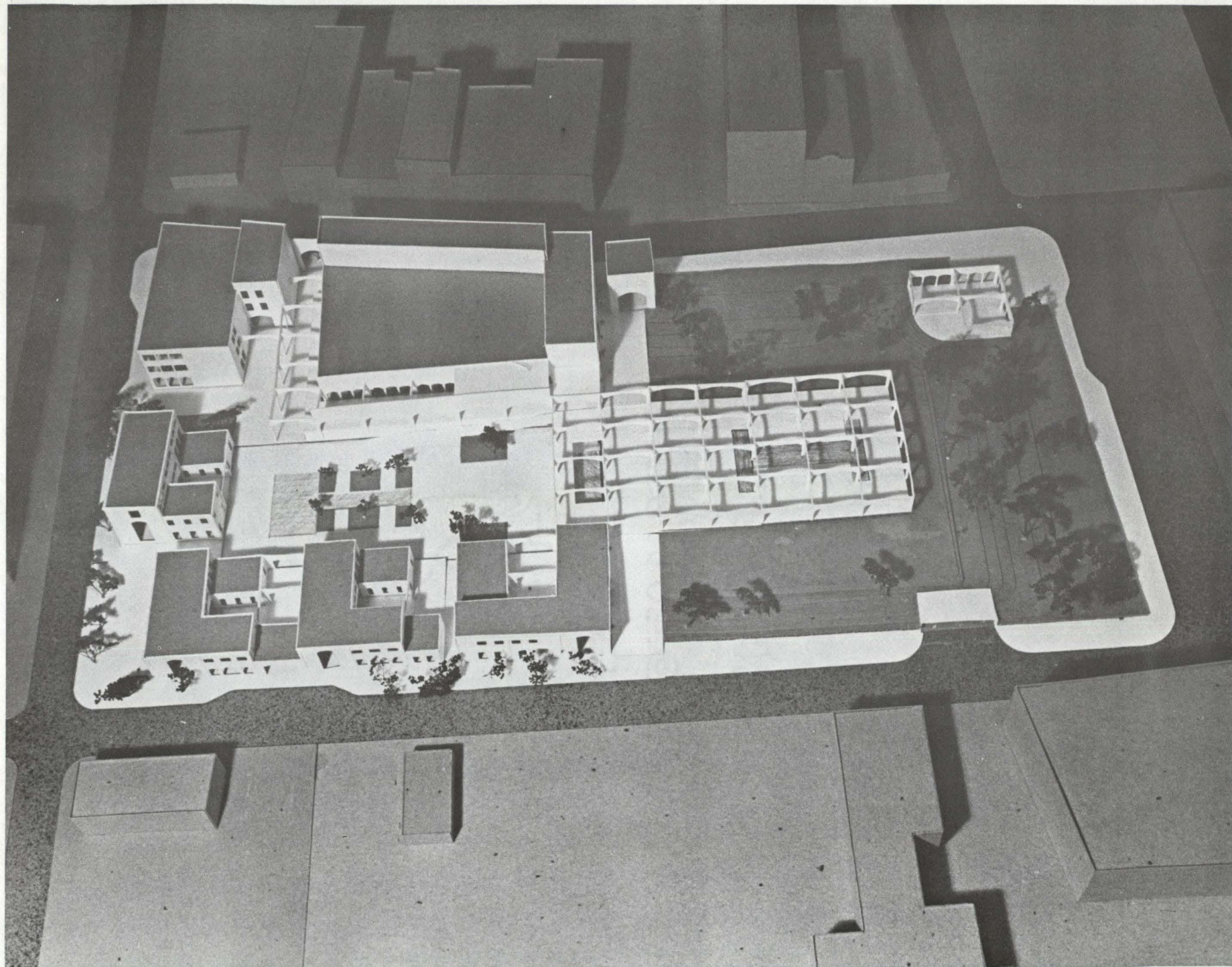
## TYPICAL CONSTRUCTION



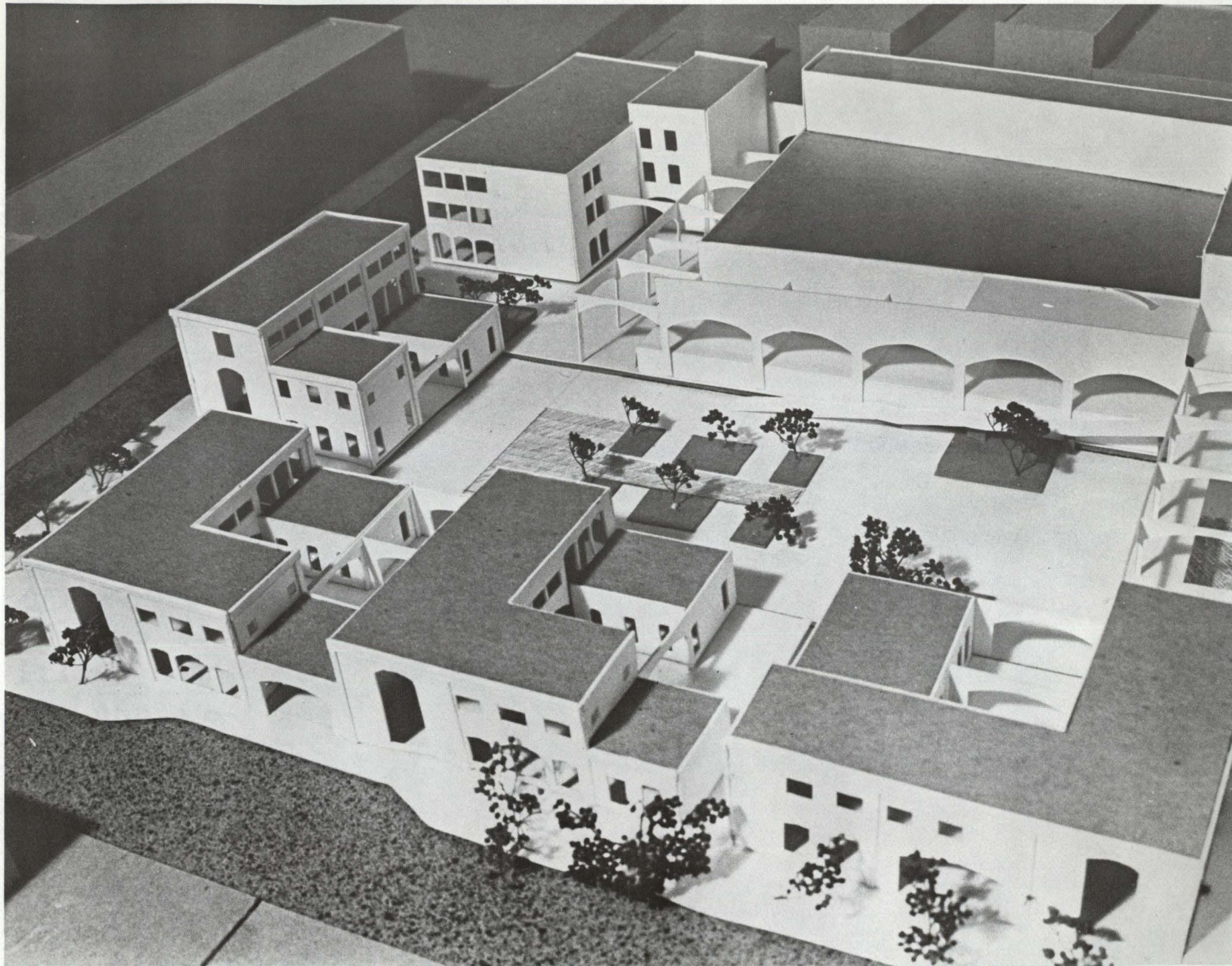


CHARACTER

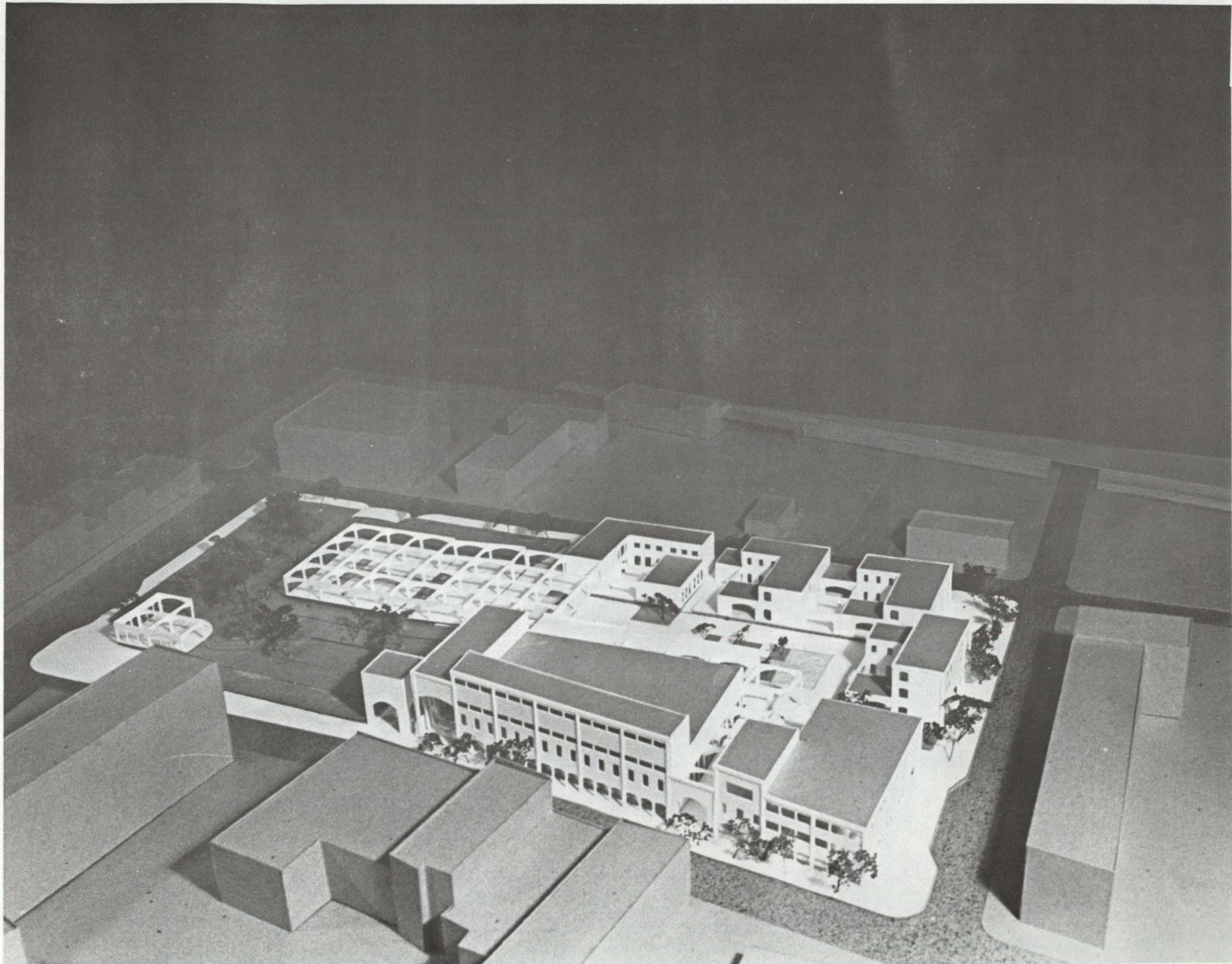




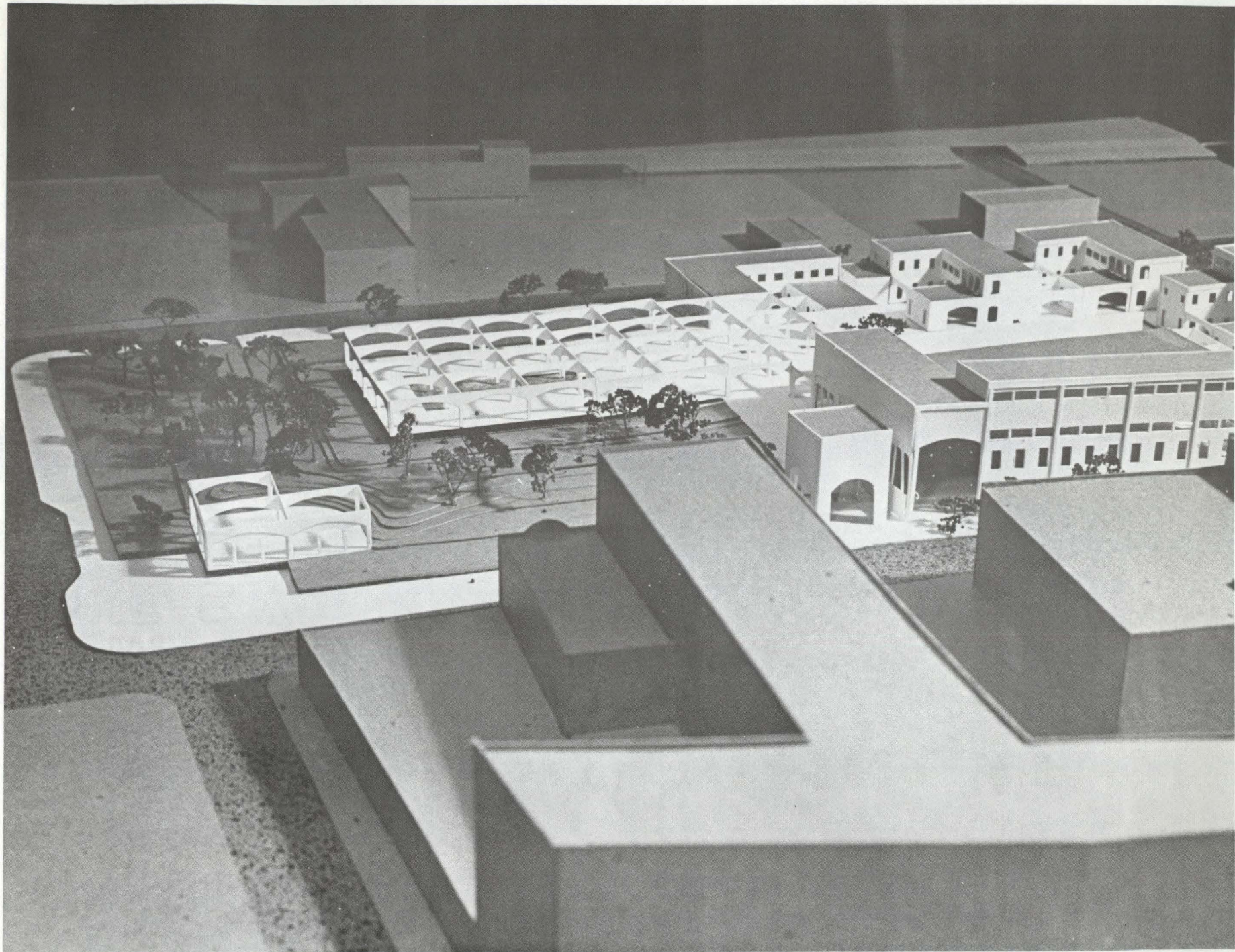




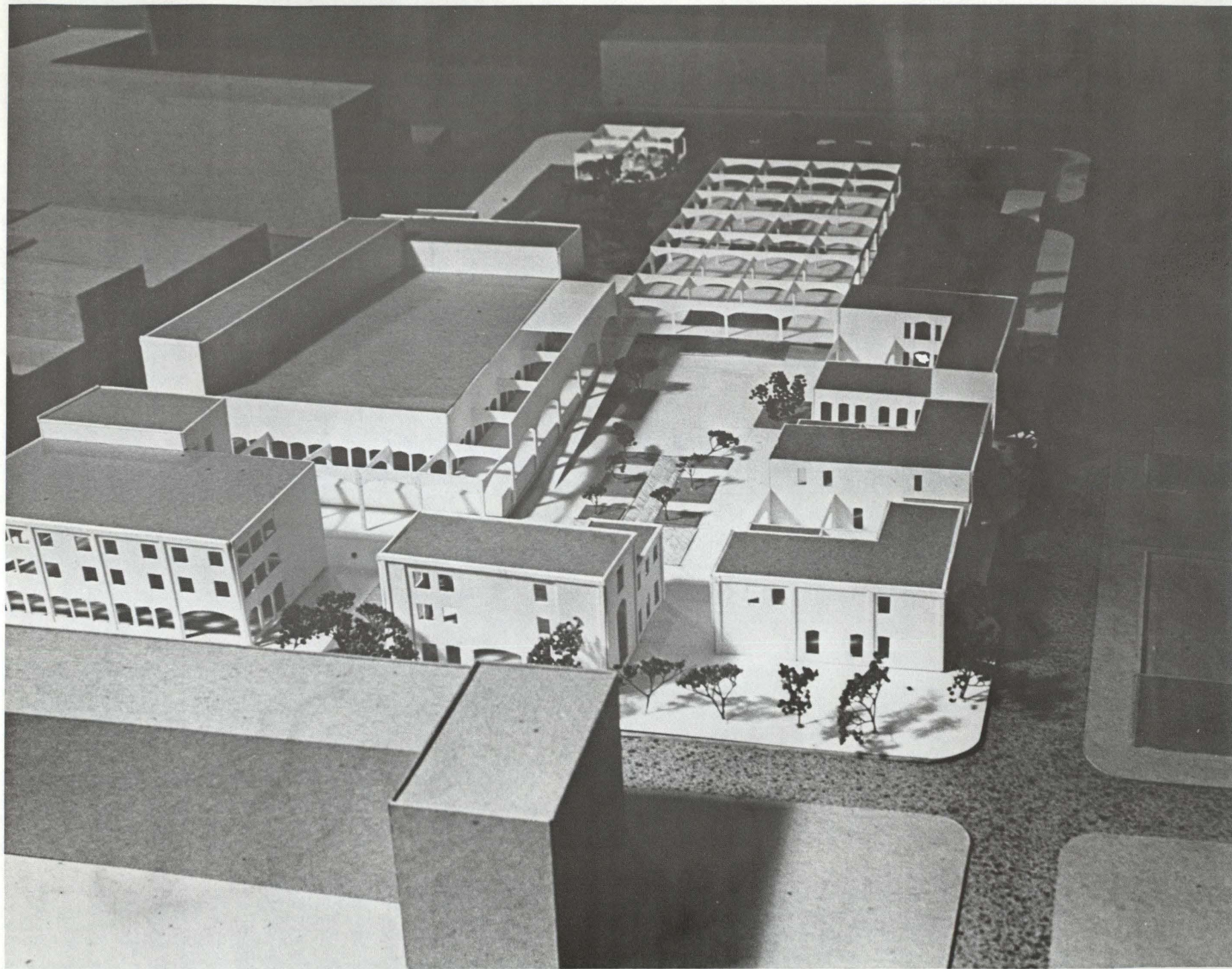














appendix



The Amended Urban Renewal Plan for the Park-Madison site (1962, revised in 1969,1971) sets five objectives for the redevelopment of the renewal site. According to the Plan, "the basic objective... is to revitalize a portion of Plainfield's Central Business District through a program of clearance and redevelopment." Other objectives noted are the improvement of the functional and physical layout of the renewal tract providing attractive new downtown development; the development of "modern" uses to strengthen the economic viability of the downtown business district, creating new employment opportunities; the improvement of traffic flow in the area; and the inclusion of appropriate off-street parking facilities. Although general in nature, these objectives indicate a prevailing attitude and are good guidelines to follow in a redevelopment plan.

The Plan also spells out several permitted and prohibited land uses (see fig. 21). Among the permitted uses are retail stores, eating and drinking establishments, theatres, studios and art galleries, and offices while included in the prohibited uses are drive-in establishments, gasoline service stations, used car lots, and the like. None of the uses outlined above as "proposed needs" are



PERMITTED USES

Fully enclosed retail stores  
Banks (drive-in auxiliary only)  
Personal service stores  
Eating and drinking establishments  
Public utility structures  
Theaters  
Bowling Alleys  
Hotels/Motels  
Grocery stores  
Studios and Art galleries  
Off-street parking and loading  
Appurtenant landscaping

PROHIBITED USES

Drive-in establishments  
Gasoline service stations  
Repair garages  
Auto dealers  
Mortuaries  
Self-service laundries

fig.21 . Permitted and Prohibited Land Uses

<sup>1</sup>Weinstein Interview,  
December 23, 1981.

specifically excluded according to this Plan, and it is expected that a variance could be obtained for such uses as a day care center or recreational lounges.<sup>1</sup>

The Renewal Plan proceeds to discuss the possible locations of various uses on the site, along with vertical height restrictions. To begin with, the maximum building coverage of the site is not to exceed eighty-five per cent of the total site area. In terms of use locations, business structures should be located with primary frontage and pedestrian access from West Front Street and Park Avenue, office structures should have primary frontage on Park Avenue or Madison Avenue, and parking structures should be located on the corner of Madison Avenue and West Second Street unless "integrated with other use structures". Residential development should be related only to the corner of Madison Avenue and West Second Street and, although residential development is not presently being contemplated, this reinforces the residential quality of that corner of the renewal tract. Open space should be located to provide maximum usability and to emphasize the "harmonious relationship of buildings and open spaces". Building setback lines of ten feet are required along West Front Street and Park Avenue.



The Plan's vertical use location (see fig.22) allows a maximum development of fifteen stories, with business use allowed one and two story development on all streets, parking facilities allowed from two levels below grade to six levels above grade depending on the particular street frontage, and residential and office development allowed the full height of fifteen stories.

Finally, the Plan discusses Design Objectives "in order to develop a functional and visually appealing environment" in the renewal area. Building Design Objectives include reflecting and complementing the character of the surrounding area; the provision of proper open space, light, air, pedestrian and vehicular circulation and security; and the complementary relation of the new building facade with those adjacent to it. Streets, pedestrian areas and other open spaces should be designed as integral parts of the overall site design, appropriately lighted and landscaped. Pedestrian walks should allow security and separation from automobile and service traffic, emphasizing desirable views and making use of durable, easily maintained materials that are indicative of their use. Landscaping should consist of non-deciduous shrubs, ground cover, and street

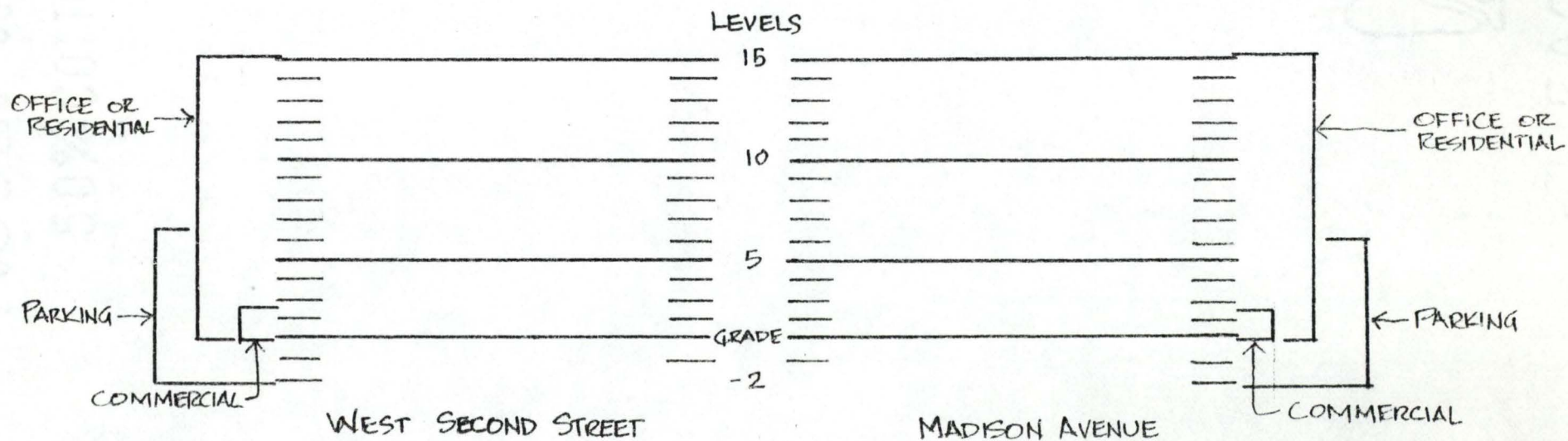
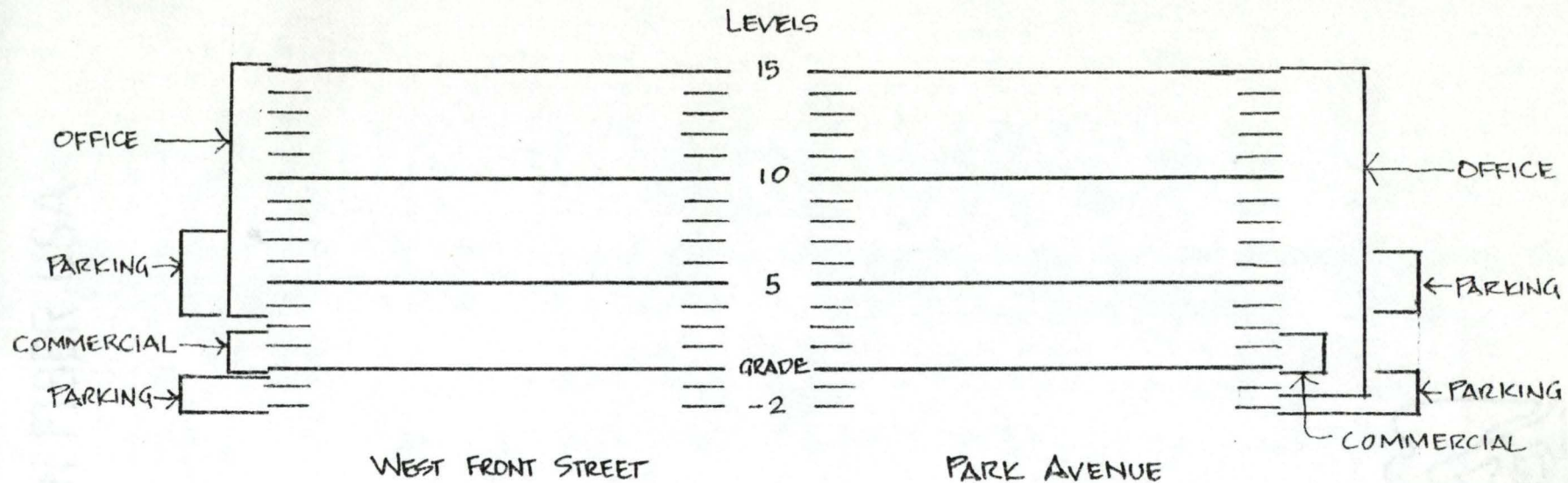


fig. 22. VERTICAL USE LOCATION.



trees consistent and appropriate to the downtown with street furniture selected to harmonize with existing development. Signs should be used as an "attractive identification element" and not for competitive advertising value. Finally, all public and private utilities will be installed underground.

Once again, these conditions indicate an attitude toward the character of any proposed development on the renewal site and, rather than being seen as restrictions, should be taken as a positive framework within which an appropriate development project may be developed.

## CURRENT DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Currently, the City of Plainfield is engaged in several physical improvement programs for the downtown area. The most important of these are the Facade Remodelling Program and the Downtown Semi-Mall Plan (also included are transportation and parking improvements and a public relations campaign).

The Facade Remodelling Program is intended to make the shopping district along Front Street more attractive by encouraging the conservative and strategic restoration of the storefronts. It is the expressed hope of the City that many of Plainfield's older downtown buildings, constructed during the late 1800's and early 1900's, will be restored to as close to their original design as possible, within reasonable financial means. This program emphasizes greater harmony between neighboring facades and throughout the downtown area by the use of materials and a balance in the size and placement of store signs, awnings, canopies, etc..

In order to assist commercial property owners in the program, the Downtown Development Corporation offers both direct financial aid, in the form of construction grants for rehabilitation along certain



guidelines, and the professional assistance of local architects, who consult in the design of the storefronts and in the selection of materials.

In 1978, the Common Council approved a plan for the creation of a new downtown "semi-mall" along Front Street between Central Avenue and Roosevelt Avenue. This project calls for Front Street to remain open for two way traffic, while certain areas of sidewalk will be widened and loading zones created. Parallel parking along Front Street will thus be eliminated and the edges of Front Street and Park Avenue will be repaved and refurbished with new lighting, street furniture, landscaping, and street signs. Pedestrian plazas are to be created at the intersections of Front Street and Church Street and at Front Street and Park Avenue. The Park Avenue plaza is also to include the elimination of the Somerset Street traffic "jog".

It seems that these are basically sound programs with good intents and the continuation of these programs is very important to the rehabilitation of the downtown Plainfield shopping environment. I



would, however, urge the City of Plainfield to reconsider the options to the problem of the Somerset Street jog as mentioned above, and to only consider the implementation of these programs (especially the creation of a plaza at the corner of Front Street and Park Avenue) concurrently with a development on the Park-Madison renewal site. To consider these issues separately would work against the City's stated purposes of harmony and unity within the downtown Plainfield cityscape.



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